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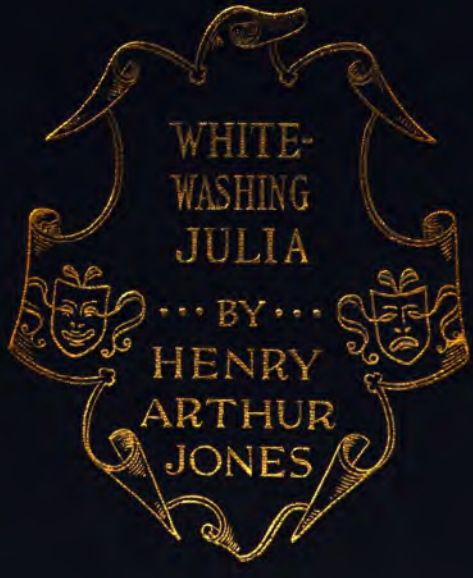
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HENRY
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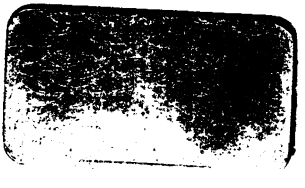

WHITEWASHING JULIA

The
Co.

WHITEWASHING JULIA

AN ORIGINAL COMEDY
IN THREE ACTS
AND AN EPILOGUE

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
LONDON, MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.
1905

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

MR. WILLIAM STILLINGFLEET, brother to Lady Pinkney.
MR. SAMWAYS, the Shanctonbury lawyer.
THE HON. EDWIN PINKNEY.
THE HON. BEVIS PINKNEY.
CHARLIE DOBBS.
GRIGGS
MR. ELKINGTON.
THE MAYOR OF SHANCTONBURY.

JULIA (MRS.) WREN.
LADY PINKNEY.
THE HON. MRS. BEVIS PINKNEY, the Bishop's daughter.
TRIXIE BLENKINSOP, the Bishop's niece.
MRS. CHAYTON.
MISS FEWINGS.
MRS. BENBOW.
ROSIE BENBOW.
MEADE, Julia's maid.
BRYANT, Lady Pinkney's maid.

ACT I.

SCENE—The Refreshment Tent in the grounds of the Bishop's Palace at Shanctonbury on the day of the Annual Bazaar and Fête in aid of the fund for Curates.

TIME—June.

ACT II.

SCENE—Morning-room at Mrs. Wren's, The Mount, Shanctonbury, on an afternoon in August, two months later.

ACT III.

SCENE—Drawing-room at Lady Pinkney's, The Hall, Shanctonbury, on an evening in the following January.

THE EPILOGUE.

SCENE—The Refreshment Tent on the Palace grounds, two years later than the first act.

NOTE—Owing to the length of time required to strike and set the respective scenes, the Epilogue may be omitted in representation.

The following is a copy of the play-bill of the first performance of "Whitewashing Julia":

GARRICK THEATRE, LONDON

Monday Evening, March 2nd, 1903

at 8.20

WHITEWASHING JULIA

An Original Comedy
in Three Acts

By HENRY ARTHUR JONES

MR. WILLIAM STILLINGFLEET . .	MR. ARTHUR BOURCHIER
MR. SAMWAYS (the Sh'ctonb'y lawyer)	MR. CHARLES GROVES
THE HON. EDWIN PINKNEY . . .	MR. SAM SOTHERN
THE HON. BEVIS PINKNEY . . .	MR. KENNETH DOUGLAS
CHARLIE DOBBS .	MASTER CHARLES WARREN
GRIGGS . . .	MR. ALBERT SIMS
JULIA WREN . .	MISS VIOLET VANBURGH
LADY PINKNEY .	MISS M. TALBOT
THE HON. MRS. BEVIS PINKNEY (the Bishop's daughter)	MISS ANNE MILDMAY
TRIXIE BLENKINSOP (the Bishop's niece)	MISS ETHELWYN ARTHUR JONES
MRS. CHAYTOR . .	MISS KATE SERGEANTSON
MISS FEWINGS . .	MISS HILDA RIVERS
MRS. BENBOW . .	MISS DOLORES DRUMMOND
ROSIE (her daughter)	MISS ELFRIDA CLEMENT
MEADE (Julia's maid)	MISS FREDA BRAMLEIGH
BRYANT (Lady Pinkney's maid) . .	MISS MARGERY FANE

ACT I.

The Refreshment Tent in the grounds of the Bishop's Palace at Shanctonbury on the day of the Annual Bazaar and Fête in aid of the Fund for Curates.

TIME—June.

ACT II.

Morning Room at Mrs. Wren's, The Mount, Shanctonbury, on an afternoon in August, two months later.

ACT III.

Drawing Room at Lady Pinkney's, The Hall, Shanctonbury, on an evening in the following January.

ACT I

SCENE—The Refreshment Tent in the grounds of the Bishop's Palace at Shanctonbury on the day of the annual summer bazaar and fête in aid of the curates' fund. The tent is of whitey brown linen and takes up the whole of the stage. At back are plants and flowers, except in the middle, where there is a recessed opening with entrances from both sides. An opening left.

Along the right side is a counter of refreshments containing tea and coffee urns and appliances; light refreshments, cakes, sandwiches, buns, and all materials for afternoon tea. The refreshments are rather meagre, and not very temptingly displayed. Stacks of clean and dirty plates and cups, disordered table cloths, refrigerators, buckets, cans, etc., in confusion at back, giving the impression that the fête is nearly at an end.

A chair and high stool in front of the counter. Basket seats down stage, left, with a small refreshment table close to them, with cups, etc., upon it.

TIME—Half-past five on an evening in early June. A band is playing in the distance.

Discover LADY PINKNEY, *a lady about fifty-five, behind the counter attending to cups, etc.* MRS. CHAYTOR, *about thirty, enters very quickly and excitedly at back.*

MRS. CHAYTOR. Yes! It was Julia! (*Look-*

ing off.) She has gone into Mrs. Blenkinsop's tent. What will Mrs. Blenkinsop do?

LADY P. I was lunching at the Palace yesterday. Both the Bishop and Mrs. Blenkinsop say it will be impossible for us to know Mrs. Wren unless the Homburg scandal is cleared up.

MRS. C. It's very awkward for me. I didn't see much of Julia during my poor brother's short married life; still she is my sister-in-law, and I can't *not* know her. And yet I can't know her—can I?

LADY P. I wish we could learn the truth of the Homburg affair. Samways is her cousin and her lawyer, and he must know all about it.

MRS. C. Of course Samways knows all about it, but he always avoids the subject. When I got Julia's letter saying she was having The Mount done up I went to Samways and explained that if she came back to Shanctonbury she would place me in a very awkward position.

LADY P. What did Samways say?

MRS. C. He asked me what I meant. I said of course I meant the scandal with the Duke of Savona. Then he asked me what I had heard. I told him I had heard what everybody else had heard. Then he asked me what everybody else had heard. I said everybody had heard all about the puff-box, and the dressing-bag, and the tor-

toiseshell comb, and—wasn't there a lace dressing jacket?

LADY P. I believe there was. Did Samways offer any explanation?

MRS. C. He said the Duchess of Savona was a madly jealous woman, and that no doubt she had placed the articles there herself, on purpose to make out a case against Julia. In fact Samways pooh-poohs the whole affair.

LADY P. I'm afraid its just one of those affairs that can't be pooh-poohed. And now Bevis has married into the Bishop's family, I suppose everybody in Shanctonbury will take care that I don't allow it to be pooh-poohed.

MRS. C. What do you intend to do?

LADY P. I shall send for Samways to-night and make him tell me the whole story in confidence. Then I shall decide whether I know Mrs. Wren, or whether I do not.

Enter left opening MISS FEWINGS, *a lady about thirty-five, a little faded and sour. She has an umbrella in her hand.*

MISS F. (*Excited*). Lady Pinkney, that woman has actually come to the bazaar. And I'm sure her dress must have come from Paris. And she has dared to go into Mrs. Blenkinsop's tent, and ask the price of some little blue pinafores that I worked myself! The Bishop only just escaped

her by passing out at the back. And in my hurry to get away from her I caught my umbrella and tore this hole in it! (*Showing the umbrella.*) My new umbrella!

(*Standing it against the table left.*)

LADY P. Did Mrs. Blenkinsop speak to her?

MISS F. Luckily Mrs. Blenkinsop was serving, so she was passed on to Miss Lane, the new school-mistress, who doesn't know Mrs. Wren's history.

LADY P. Do any of us know Mrs. Wren's history?

MISS F. Dear Lady Pinkney, I gave you the whole story just as I had it from my aunt—the puff-box, the dressing-bag, the tortoiseshell comb and—the other affair. My aunt was in Homburg only a month after the scandal, when everybody was full of it.

Enter at back BRYANT, *a woman-servant, bringing a fresh supply of cakes, hot water, etc., and a dish of very fine large strawberries which she puts on the counter.* MRS. CHAYTOR *goes up to back and looks off.*

BRYANT. I've brought the things, my lady; and there's a dish of very fine strawberries that Griggs was saving for dessert to-night. But he thought you might like them here.

LADY P. Very well, Bryant. We shan't have

many more customers. (*Taking out her watch.*) Quarter to six. Leave those things on the counter. We will attend to anyone who comes.

BRYANT. Yes, my lady.

(*Exit* BRYANT *at back.*)

MRS. C. (*looking off at back on the opposite side*). Julia has just come out of Mrs. Blenkinsop's tent, with a boy carrying some large parcels.

MISS F. My little openwork pinafores!

LADY P. My dear Caroline, she can't possibly wear them herself. (*Taking out telegram and giving it to* MISS FEWINGS.) Here is something that may interest you. From my brother.

MISS F. (*Takes telegram, reads it.*) From Mr. Stillingfleet! He's coming to Shanctonbury today! Oh, Lady Pinkney, how can it interest me?

(*Giving back telegram with a little confusion.*)

LADY P. (*taking back the telegram*). My dear Caroline, I've always felt you were wrong to refuse Bill.

MISS F. Perhaps I was! But at that time—

LADY P. Oh, I know he was up to his ears in debt.

MISS F. I wasn't thinking of his debts.

LADY P. You mean his conduct. Yes. (*Sighs deeply.*) I'm afraid Bill has been a very shocking rascal.

MISS F. Do you think he has reformed?

LADY P. He ought, by this time. He's over forty.

MISS F. I think I should be more inclined now than I was to look over any little—manly weaknesses. Is he making a long stay at Shanctonbury?

LADY P. He has finally given up his post at Constantinople, so I've asked him to stay here until Pinkney returns from Australia. Now think the matter over. And on my side, I shall lose no chance of letting Bill know that he still has a chance of becoming a respectable member of society.

MISS F. Thank you—I'm sure you won't compromise me.

Enter at left opening the HON. MRS. BEVIS PINKNEY, *a young lady with straight dull sandy hair, a dull livid complexion, lustreless eyes, thin lips, and a listless, frigid, correct manner. She is followed by her husband, the* HON. BEVIS PINKNEY, *about twenty-five, with a priggish, authoritative, and somewhat clerical manner.*

BEVIS (*to* LADY PINKNEY). My dear mother, you will have to take up an exceedingly firm attitude with regard to this lady.

LADY P. What has happened?

MRS. B. The "lady" paid our stall the honour of a visit. Mamma was selling a large red coun-

terpane, so that protected her. Then the "lady" had the audacity to come up to me and ask the price of some little blue pinafores.

(*A short choking exclamation from* MISS FEWINGS.)

LADY P. I hope you charged her extra on account of her antecedents.

MRS. B. I simply declined to see the "lady." I merely took up a box of babies' woollen gaiters from the counter, and studied them.

BEVIS. Your behaviour was admirable, Sophia. I will take care, and I'm sure my mother will take care, that you are not subjected to such a disagreeable experience in the future.

MRS. B. Can I have a cup of tea?

MRS. C. Certainly. I'll make you a fresh cup.

(*Goes behind the counter and makes tea for* MR. *and* MRS. BEVIS.)

MRS. B. (*noticing the dish of strawberries*). What lovely strawberries! That reminds me—poor Mrs. Galer——

LADY P. Galer?

MRS. B. The new curate's wife at Saint Radegonde's—last week—you've heard, I suppose?

LADY P. Yes. Her eighth, isn't it?

MRS. B. Her ninth, I believe. I promised I'd call after the bazaar. May I take her these strawberries?

LADY P. Certainly, my dear. Her ninth? Take her some cream as well.

MRS. B. Thank you. (*To* MRS. CHAYTOR.) Will you put these strawberries and cream in some place where they won't get sold or eaten?

MRS. C. (*taking up the strawberries and cream*). Yes! Let me see! (*Looking about.*) I'll put them here under the counter. (*Placing them under counter.*) Nobody will get at them there.

MRS. B. Thank you. I'll call for them after the bazaar, and take them to poor Mrs. Galer.

BEVIS. Ah! What a contrast Mrs. Galer presents to the other lady.

LADY P. To Mrs. Wren? Yes, one has a scandal with a foreign royal duke, and the other has nine children to a starving curate. Very careless, foolish women, both of them! I don't know which is most to blame!

BEVIS. (*reprovingly*). I'm sorry you regard this as a subject for a jest.

(MR. SAMWAYS *puts his head in at back, and is about to withdraw. He is an old-fashioned country lawyer, about sixty-five, dry, shrewd, clever.*)

LADY P. (*seeing him*). Ah, Mr. Samways! Don't go! You're just the person we want.

SAMWAYS (*coming in reluctantly*). How d'ye do, Lady Pinkney? (*Shaking hands.*)

LADY P. So your cousin, Mrs. Wren, is back in Shanctonbury?

SAMWAYS. (*Uncomfortable*). My second cousin! Yes, poor dear girl.

BEVIS. Are you aware if she intends to remain?

SAMWAYS. Well—yes—perhaps for some time.

BEVIS. Not under your advice, I trust?

SAMWAYS (*getting more uncomfortable*). Well—I'm afraid I am in some measure responsible. When she consulted me, I said, "My dear Julia, of course everybody understands your natural delicacy——"

BEVIS. Delicacy?!

SAMWAYS. "In staying away from Shanctonbury and your old friends, while these stories were being freshly circulated. But now that three years have past, and nobody believes them——"

MRS. B. Nobody believes them?!

SAMWAYS. Nobody who knows the circumstances.

LADY P. But, Samways, who does know the circumstances?

(SAMWAYS *looks very uncomfortable.*)

BEVIS. Has Mrs. Wren taken any steps to refute these stories?

SAMWAYS. No, no—she came to me three years ago, and asked me what to do, and I said "Do? Nothing! Remain perfectly silent. Your own reputation is a sufficient answer."

MRS. F. Nobody's reputation could be a sufficient answer to the puff-box, and the—the—other articles——

SAMWAYS. Oh, pardon me, Miss Fewings. I'm sure your reputation would be a sufficient answer; and I humbly trust that my reputation would be a sufficient answer to any puff-box.

LADY P. Then you honestly believe, Samways, that these stories against Mrs. Wren are false?

SAMWAYS. (*Most uncomfortable.*) My dear Lady Pinkney, I am Mrs. Wren's legal adviser, as I am yours, and Lord Pinkney's. (*Gaining assurance as he goes on.*) And I can only say that were any defamatory story circulated against you, or against any lady here present, I should defend you all with the same conviction of your innocence (*catches* MRS. BEVIS's *eye and falters*), that I cherish with regard to—a—this very dear, and I will say this very much injured lady. (*Glancing out of the tent opening.*) The weather seems a little threatening again. (*Moving to get out of tent.*)

LADY P. (*calling him back*). But, Samways, you must see it's impossible for us to receive Mrs. Wren until we know the truth of this business.

SAMWAYS. Certainly! And if I can be of any use—— (*Going off at back.*)

LADY P. (*calling him back*). Are you engaged for dinner to-night?

SAMWAYS. No—at least——

LADY P. We shall expect you at eight, and you shall give us the correct version of the whole affair, and set our minds at rest. And then I hope we shall be able to take this very dear, and this very much injured lady to our hearts and homes again. (SAMWAYS *looks very uncomfortable.*) At eight then?

SAMWAYS. Delighted—delighted.

(*Exit, very uncomfortable, at back.*)

MISS F. Samways means to help her to wriggle out of it.

BEVIS. We must take care she doesn't. We must insist upon evidence.

MRS. B. I really don't see the need for evidence when one has already made up one's mind.

MISS F. Quite so. Evidence merely confuses and unsettles one. It's so much better to have a firm, steady conviction from the first, and never change it.

Enter, at back, TRIXIE BLENKINSOP, *a bright, excitable girl of about seventeen.*

LADY P. My dear Trixie, how is it you have left your stall?

TRIXIE. Sold out! There was such a pretty woman in pale blue came and bought up all my rubbish.

MISS F. (*to* LADY PINKNEY). Mrs. Wren!

TRIXIE. Yes, that's her name! I did stick on the prices at first. You know that awful green antimacassar thing—— (*Stops, seeing* MRS. BEVIS's *face.*)

MRS. B. Mamma worked that!

TRIXIE. Yes, I know she did. But because she's your mother and my aunt doesn't make her antimacassars not awful. It is awful! And I rooked Mrs. Wren out of two guineas for it. I rooked her over heaps of other things; but when I saw what a nice dear thing she was, my better nature prevailed, and I owned up I'd been swindling her. And she forgave me, and I promised I'd go and have tea with her on Sunday.

(*General consternation.* LADY PINKNEY *silences the others with a gesture.*)

TRIXIE. What's the matter?

LADY P. Nothing, my dear. How was it that you were at your stall alone? Your cousin (*glancing at* MRS. BEVIS) and my son Edwin were to take charge of you?

TRIXIE. I had a furious row with Sophie, and worried her back to her mother, didn't I, Sophie?

(*Appealing to* MRS. BEVIS, *who pulls herself up and disdains to notice* TRIXIE.)

LADY P. And Edwin?

TRIXIE. Teddy sloped as soon as the bazaar was opened.

LADY P. Teddy deserted you? Where can he have gone? (*Glancing at* BEVIS.)

BEVIS. We may be quite sure that wherever Teddy is, it is somewhere he ought not to be; and whatever he is doing, it is something he ought not to be doing.

LADY P. Did your aunt see you serving this very charming lady?

TRIXIE. No, I had a furious row with auntie just after lunch, and she told me not to see her or speak to her again all day.

(LADY PINKNEY *turns with a gesture of despair to* MRS. BEVIS.)

MRS. B. (*to* LADY PINKNEY). She's simply unbearable!

(MISS FEWINGS, *who has been looking off at back, suddenly shows great alarm, comes to* LADY PINKNEY, *draws her hurriedly aside and whispers something.* LADY PINKNEY *shows considerable perplexity for a moment, then makes a soothing gesture to* MISS FEWINGS. BEVIS *comes up to her as if to inquire.* LADY PINKNEY *makes the same gesture to him.* MISS FEWINGS *and* MRS. BEVIS *go to back and look off.*)

LADY P. Trixie, the raffle of the unsold things

is about to begin. (*Taking out purse.*) Will you take six tickets for me?

TRIXIE. All right.

LADY P. There! (*Giving her money.*) Bevis, please take Trixie over to the raffling tent.

TRIXIE. I know my way.

LADY P. (*authoritatively*). Bevis!

(MISS FEWINGS *comes back to* LADY PINKNEY *with renewed alarm.* LADY PINKNEY *quiets her.* BEVIS *is preparing to escort* TRIXIE *off at back.* MISS FEWINGS *makes a little warning sign.*)

LADY P. Bevis, I think this is the nearest way.

(*Indicating left, with a little look at* BEVIS. BEVIS *holds the curtains open for* TRIXIE *to go out. Exit* TRIXIE, *left.*)

BEVIS. You see it will be necessary to take a very firm attitude towards Mrs. Wren.

(*Exit, left, after* TRIXIE. *The ladies look at each other, and there is a pause of expectation; they stand in somewhat constrained attitudes.* MISS FEWINGS *advances on tiptoe to back opening, glances out, makes a sign to them, suddenly withdraws herself, stands rigidly indignant.* MRS. CHAYTOR *is behind counter, takes up a dish*

of cakes, and is absorbed in arranging them geometrically. LADY PINKNEY *calmly sits down.* MRS. BEVIS *stands at the corner of the table, left, her nose very high in the air, intently gazing at nothing, periodically tapping the table with her middle finger.*)

After another little pause of expectation, enter, at back, JULIA WREN, *a lady rather under thirty. She is very tastefully but quietly dressed; she is always perfectly self-possessed, but never obtrusive or aggressive; her voice is never raised; she has soft, winning manners, and a pleasing, flattering, deferential air which has nothing in it of humility or subservience. She stands for a moment, quite self-possessed, but as if a little puzzled.*

JULIA. I beg your pardon. How d'ye do, Lady Pinkney? (*With a little bow.*)

LADY P. (*Bows stiffly.*) How d'ye do?

JULIA (*cordially, to* MRS. CHAYTOR). Ah, Georgina—— (*With a more cordial bow.*)

MRS. C. (*coldly*). How d'ye do, Julia?

JULIA. I thought I could get a cup of tea—but (*to* LADY PINKNEY) perhaps I'm too late?

LADY P. No, I think not—there is still a little tea left, isn't there?

(*Appealing to* MRS. CHAYTOR.)

MRS. C. (*looking into the teapot*). Yes—but it's nearly cold——

JULIA. I prefer it not too warm.

MRS. C. And very strong.

JULIA. I like it rather strong.

MRS. C. (*looking into teapot*). But it's really quite stewed——

JULIA. I'm so thirsty, I don't mind its being stewed.

(MRS. CHAYTOR *pours out tea with angry acquiescence.*)

CHARLIE DOBBS, *a boy of fifteen, enters at back, burdened with an array of parcels, very badly tied up, as if by amateurs.*

JULIA. Oh, I meant you to leave them outside; at least, (*glancing outside*) I'm afraid it's going to rain. Lady Pinkney, may I leave my parcels here for a few moments?

LADY P. By all means.

JULIA. Put them there, Charlie—didn't you say your name was Charlie?

CHARLIE. Yes, Miss.

JULIA. There's a shilling for the raffle, Charlie. Come and fetch the parcels when the raffle is over.

CHARLIE. Oh, thank you, Miss.

(*He looks at her with great admiration, deposits the parcels at back—looks at*

her again with great admiration, and as he goes off at back, throws a very languishing look at her unseen by anyone.)

JULIA. I should have been so sorry if my purchases had got wet. I've bought some very sweet things—three of the dearest little blue openwork pinafores——

(*A little choking gulp from* MISS FEWINGS, *who has been standing rigid and indignant at back, with a firm resolution to hold her ground. She now glances indignantly at* JULIA, *and marches off at back, making a sign to* MRS. BEVIS *to follow her.*)

MRS. C. (*behind counter, handing tea to* JULIA). There's no cream, and that's all the milk——

JULIA. Thank you. (*Taking tea.*) That will be quite sufficient.

MRS. B. Lady Pinkney, I'm not wanted here any longer, am I?

LADY P. No, my dear, we shall get no more victims to-day.

(MRS. BEVIS *goes off at back, nose in air, making a sign to* LADY PINKNEY *to follow her.*)

LADY P. (*to* MRS. CHAYTOR). I'll leave you to finish up here.

MRS. C. Very well. I'm coming in a moment.

(JULIA *bows to* LADY PINKNEY *as she is going off at back.*)

LADY P. (*Returns the bow.*) Are you making a long stay in Shanctonbury?

JULIA. A few weeks perhaps.

LADY P. You made some purchases of the Bishop's niece, Miss Trixie Blenkinsop, I believe?

JULIA. A few trifles. What a charming girl!

LADY P. You think so? I understand she has thoughtlessly invited herself to tea with you.

JULIA. She wished to come.

LADY P. Trixie has been left to servants, and she is quite spoilt. She is here to study under the Bishop's chaplain. I'm sure you won't encourage her to do anything against Mrs. Blenkinsop's wishes.

JULIA. Indeed no. Pray assure Mrs. Blenkinsop I shouldn't dream of having her niece to tea without her consent.

LADY P. Thank you. I hope you'll have pleasant weather for your little stay in Shanctonbury.

(*Bows very slightly and goes off at back.* MRS. CHAYTOR *has remained distant and cold behind the counter.*)

JULIA. You're looking wonderfully well, Georgina. (MRS. CHAYTOR *takes no notice—*

pause.) I've been a week at the Mount, and you haven't called.

MRS. C. My dear Julia, how could I? (*Very curtly.*) Do you want any more tea?

JULIA. No, thank you. How's Frank?

MRS. C. Mr. Chaytor is out in Australia with Lord Pinkney, looking after the new estate.

JULIA. I hope he's quite well.

MRS. C. Quite well.

JULIA. And your mother?

MRS. C. (*curtly*). Quite well.

JULIA. And my poor old Curly-Locks?

MRS. C. Quite well—No, Curly-Locks is dead. He got very mangy, and we had him poisoned. I must really be going. If you want anything more, will you help yourself?

(*Going off at back.*)

JULIA. But I haven't paid——

MRS. C. You can leave a shilling on the counter. (*Going off.*)

JULIA. Is anything the matter?

MRS. C. Matter? I wrote you if you came back to Shanctonbury you'd be cut by everybody. And you can't imagine how embarrassing it is for me.

JULIA. My dear Georgina, if it's embarrassing for you, what must it be for me?

MRS. C. But what caused you to return?

JULIA. I was tired of wandering about. The

Mount has been empty for two years; I couldn't let it; I couldn't sell it; and I couldn't afford to let it stand empty any longer. I came back to Shanctonbury because I'd nowhere else to go.

MRS. C. You've made a false step. It isn't that I'm strait-laced. I would willingly receive you, but in this world we musn't be guided solely by our own feelings. We must think of others.

JULIA. But—you received me three years ago.

MRS. C. That was before the puff-box. Of course before the puff-box we were all willing to shut our eyes and believe the best—especially as he was royal.

JULIA. But since the puff-box—?

MRS. C. Well it was a most unfortunate discovery——(SAMWAYS *enters rather cautiously, left.*) Ah, Mr. Samways, I was just telling Julia —Now, my dear Julia, take my advice—stay a few days longer, don't seem to hide yourself—you might come to church, and so on, and then—go quietly away to some nice place on the continent, and stay there. I'm speaking for your good.

(*Going off at back.*)

JULIA. But you surely don't believe these stories about me?

MRS. C. My dear Julia! (*Exit at back.*)

(SAMWAYS *watches her off, then looks at* JULIA, *pulls a long face.*)

SAMWAYS. Well—what did I tell you?

JULIA. But have you explained to them——?

SAMWAYS. No, my dear. Up to the present I've carefully avoided explanations, but I've got to dine with Lady Pinkney to-night, and——

JULIA. That will give you a splendid opportunity, won't it?

SAMWAYS. Opportunity to do what?

JULIA. To prove to them—how unfortunate I've been.

SAMWAYS. Yes—yes—But (*looking sternly at her over his spectacles*) how do we get over the puff-box?

JULIA. The puff-box?

SAMWAYS. And the other things?

JULIA. You can't expect me to remember all the details!

SAMWAYS. No, but broadly speaking the question is this—Do we own up to the puff-box, and render some more or less satisfactory explanation of it? Or do we deny the very existence of the puff-box? Is the puff-box a myth?

JULIA (*falteringly*). Well—a—what do you think?

SAMWAYS. (*Impatient.*) What do *I* think?

JULIA. You're a lawyer. You surely don't expect me to teach you your business?

SAMWAYS (*getting more impatient*). My dear Julia, do let me explain to you once for all the nature of evidence——

JULIA. No—please don't—my poor brain could never take in all your legal technicalities.

SAMWAYS. But if I'm to defend you, and get Lady Pinkney to take you up again, I must know what line to take. Now give me the exact particulars.

JULIA. I have given you the exact particulars —more than once.

SAMWAYS. Yes, but the exact particulars have never been quite the same. Now let us make up our mind once for all what the exact particulars are.

JULIA. Suppose——

SAMWAYS. Yes?

JULIA. Suppose I had a perfect answer to all these insinuations, but for urgent reasons my lips were closed. What would you advise me to do?

SAMWAYS. I should advise you to open them.

JULIA (*reproachfully*). I see you don't believe in me!

SAMWAYS. Yes, yes I do. What is the nature of this evidence that you can't reveal?

JULIA. (*After a pause, mysteriously*). Do you know anything about morganatic marriages?

SAMWAYS. Not much—why?

JULIA. (*Mysterious — resigned.*) Nothing! It doesn't matter.

SAMWAYS. Morganatic marriage? It won't

do, my dear girl! It's absurd—impossible on the face of it.

JULIA (*reproachfully*). You don't believe in me! It's hard when one's own relations don't believe in one. (*Beginning to cry.*)

SAMWAYS. Come—come—don't cry. But now—this morganatic marriage?

JULIA (*mysteriously*). Have you any law-books on the subject of morganatic marriages?

SAMWAYS. I dare say I have.

JULIA. Will you kindly lend them to me?

SAMWAYS. Yes, but can't I sift the whole thing out for you——?

JULIA. No. (*Sad—resigned.*) I'll try and puzzle it out for myself. I'll send my maid for the law-books to-night. (*Looking at watch.*) I suppose I'd better put in an appearance at the raffle. (*Going off at back.*)

SAMWAYS. But, Julia, do let me clearly understand——

JULIA. Don't ask me any more. My lips are closed. (*Exit at back.*)

SAMWAYS (*calling after her*). But—Julia—(*Makes a gesture of annoyance.*) Good Heaven! How is it that women can never understand the nature of evidence?

BEVIS PINKNEY *enters, left, very furtively, and*

with some alarm, which he tries to conceal on seeing SAMWAYS.

SAMWAYS. Anything the matter?

BEVIS. (A *little confused.*) No. (SAMWAYS *is going off at back.*) Samways——

SAMWAYS. Yes.

BEVIS. If I wished to consult you——

SAMWAYS. Certainly——

BEVIS. (*Glances furtively left.*) It doesn't concern myself——

SAMWAYS. Whom does it concern?

BEVIS. A dear old Oxford friend of mine——

SAMWAYS. Yes——

BEVIS. Are you busy for a few moments?

SAMWAYS. No. Go on.

BEVIS. This friend of mine——call him Brown——while at Oxford was betrayed into ——a——friendship with a very undesirable young woman, and in his desperation he came to me——

SAMWAYS. Yes? Well?

BEVIS. Seeing that the poor fellow had been led away I promised to help him——

SAMWAYS. In what way?

BEVIS. To——a——pay the girl and her mother handsomely, and get them out of the country. I arranged the matter for him and got them away to Melbourne.

SAMWAYS. What then?

BEVIS. I've just caught sight of the mother—possibly the daughter has returned also—it would be a terrible blow to my friend if these women were to turn up again.

SAMWAYS. Was there any result in Brown's friendship—with the undesirable young woman?

BEVIS. Result? No——

SAMWAYS. Then what's disturbing you?

BEVIS. Nothing. I merely wondered whether these people have any possible claim upon my friend.

SAMWAYS. Have they any letters of Brown's?

BEVIS. No—not a scrap.

SAMWAYS. Did he make the girl any promises—before witnesses?

BEVIS. No. He was most careful. In fact, I believe she doesn't know his real name.

SAMWAYS. Then Brown has nothing to fear so far as I can see.

BEVIS. Thank you. You may imagine this is a most unpleasant business for anyone in my position to be connected with.

SAMWAYS. Yes—to be sure.

BEVIS. On the whole, however, I think it has been of some benefit to me; as it has taught me to be very strict in all such matters.

SAMWAYS. Naturally. (*Going towards left*

opening. BEVIS *makes a little movement of alarm behind him.*)

SAMWAYS. Where did you see the woman? Is she outside now?

(BEVIS *makes another movement of alarm.*)

SAMWAYS (*looking off*). Ah! By Jove!

BEVIS. (*Again alarmed.*) What is it?

SAMWAYS. Bill Stillingfleet!

BEVIS. My uncle!

SAMWAYS (*shouting off, waving his hand*). How are you? Welcome back! How are you?

MR. WILLIAM STILLINGFLEET *enters left—a handsome genial man of rather over forty.*

STILL. Ah, my dear Samways, how are you?

SAMWAYS (*shaking hands cordially*). First rate!

STILL. Bevis, my dear lad, how are you?

BEVIS (*coldly*). Quite well, thanks.

STILL. How's Teddy?

BEVIS. Teddy is as usual. My brother and I have nothing in common.

STILL. Let me see, you were married a few months ago. My congratulations! You must present me.

BEVIS. Of course. Perhaps I may as well prepare you——

STILL. No bad news, I hope?

BEVIS. No. But—everything was very lax at

the Palace in the old Bishop's time. My father-in-law, the present Bishop, and my mother-in-law, Mrs. Blenkinsop, have inaugurated a totally new *régime.*

STILL. Ah! Not lax, eh?

BEVIS. No, on the contrary. I needn't say we're delighted to see you—

STILL. Thank you.

BEVIS. You're going to stay some months with us.

STILL. Well—yes—if the new *régime* is not too—too bracing.

BEVIS. Of course I don't wish to remind you of certain incidents that occurred during your former visits to Shanctonbury——

STILL. Well then, don't remind me.

BEVIS. Incidents I'm sure we all wish to see buried——

STILL. I'm sure we do—nobody more than myself. We'll bury them straight off, shall we? In fact we'll cremate them!

(SAMWAYS *has gone to refreshment counter and has helped himself. He stands behind* BEVIS *chuckling at* STILLINGFLEET *and enjoying the lecture.*)

BEVIS. In all seriousness, uncle, in all sincerity, in all friendliness, I hope you'll allow me to give you a word of advice.

STILL. (*bending towards him*). Certainly!

BEVIS. You may think me presumptuous——

STILL. No! I'm sure from the tone you're taking, you're actuated by a genuine desire for my welfare—aren't you? Come now! Confess it!

BEVIS. I am indeed.

STILL. I was sure of it. Now, go on!

BEVIS. If I may give you a caution, which you must allow is justified by certain incidents in your former visits——

STILL. My dear boy, we cremated them some minutes ago.

BEVIS. So far as possible——

STILL. My dear Bevis, when you cremate a thing, cremate it, and have done with it. Don't go raking amongst the dead ashes!

BEVIS. In any case we shall expect you to adopt the somewhat altered standard that now prevails in Shanctonbury.

STILL. I will! I will! Nobody is more anxious to improve other people's morals than I am.

BEVIS. I see you haven't changed, uncle. I'm afraid you won't find your present visit a very congenial one. (*Exit at back.*)

STILL. That clammy young prig hasn't altered in the least. How has the elder one turned out?

SAMWAYS. Teddy? We've had a terrible time with Teddy.

STILL. You mean the dancer?

SAMWAYS. Yes. Teddy would insist on marrying the girl. We had the devil's own job to part them—at last Lord Pinkney dragged Teddy off to Australia, and I squared the girl with five thousand pounds, five thousand gold sovereigns.

STILL. Teddy's back again, isn't he?

SAMWAYS. Yes. Poor Teddy! I like him! There's no vice in Teddy—he's only a damned silly sentimental idiot.

The HON. EDWIN PINKNEY *has sauntered in left, to overhear the last sentence. He is a weak, good-natured, rather slangy man about thirty.* SAMWAYS *is much disconcerted.*

TEDDY. Yes, I heard that, Samways. You were talking about me.

SAMWAYS. (*Greatly disconcerted.*) No—I —a——

TEDDY. Oh yes you were. I recognized the description.

SAMWAYS. I'm very sorry.

TEDDY (*patting* SAMWAYS *on the shoulder cordially*). Don't you fret about that, Samways. Does us good to hear the truth about ourselves sometimes.

(SAMWAYS *makes a profound apologetic gesture to* TEDDY, *who turns to* STIL-

LINGFLEET. SAMWAYS *then grins at* STILLINGFLEET *behind* TEDDY, *and goes off at back.*)

TEDDY. (*To* STILLINGFLEET.) Ah, Uncle Bill, how goes it?

STILL. How are you, Teddy?

(*Shaking hands.*)

TEDDY. I'm rather slack at present. I'm awfully glad you're back again.

STILL. Thank you.

TEDDY. You've come just in time to help me bear the brunt of the avalanche.

STILL. Avalanche—of what nature?

TEDDY. Maternal and fraternal, with paternal rumblings in the distance.

STILL. I'm sorry—what's the matter?

TEDDY. You've had a blazing time of it, Uncle Bill, in your life?

STILL. How—blazing?

TEDDY. With the ladies, I mean. You've gone through heaps of worries, and rows, and cussedness, and misfortunes——

STILL. Yes — (*Sighs.*) Heaps! Heaps, Teddy! (*Sighs.*) Wish I'd got them all to go through again!

TEDDY. I wish you'd got my lot to go through.

STILL. Tell me.

TEDDY. Thanks, awfully. You don't know how the old lady rags me—And Bevis! He's a

holy horror, Bevis. I tell you, Uncle Bill, when I look round on my brother Bevis and all this Shanctonbury gang, I begin to turn towards social democracy.

STILL. Oh, it can't be as bad as that, Teddy.

TEDDY. Yes. (*Maunders on.*) Well, the year before last I proposed to a certain young lady —she was a singer and dancer. I won't say she was all she ought to have been, but I proposed to her, like an honourable man.

STILL. But that's all past and done with?

TEDDY. Oh yes. The governor and old Samways squashed it, and married the gal to a riding-master. Since then she has eloped with a book-maker. So I was jolly well out of that, eh?

STILL. Looks like it—at the first blush.

TEDDY. Well, the governor carted me off to Australia till folks here had done talking about it—I hope I'm not boring you?

STILL. Not at all.

TEDDY. Thanks awfully. I knew you'd sympathize with me. That's what I want, sympathy —a little human sympathy! And I came to you because you being a bit of a black sheep yourself, eh?

STILL. Well—whitey brown——

TEDDY. You know, I think we black sheep ought to stick together, and help each other over

the stile. Well, I got back from Australia three months ago——

STILL. What happened then?

TEDDY. The old lady didn't kill the fatted calf for me, I assure you.

STILL. She didn't?

TEDDY. No. If it had been Bevis now—but Teddy? Oh dear no! No fatted calf for poor Teddy!

STILL. No fatted calf for poor Teddy, eh?

TEDDY. Instead of trotting out the fatted calf, she trots out a Miss Trixie Blenkinsop, the Bishop's niece, and Teddy is expected to fall down and worship the little beast and marry her.

STILL. What does Teddy say to that?

TEDDY. No, thank you. Bevis has married a Blenkinsop. One Bevis and one Blenkinsop are enough in any family. Besides (*a little shyly*), coming over in the boat from Australia there was such a handsome girl—

STILL. What?! Teddy! you haven't committed yourself again?

TEDDY. No! No!

STILL. Who is this jolly girl?

TEDDY. Well, some folks might think her a bit of an outsider; but she appeals to me.

STILL. How—appeals to you?

TEDDY. Well, she appeals to me—she—appeals to me.

STILL. What are her people?

TEDDY. She's only got a mother. The mother ain't exactly a jewel of the first water.

STILL. Teddy, this won't do! I've not been quite a pattern, as you know. But I think I may say I've always managed to keep on the right side of that very fine line.

TEDDY. What very fine line?

STILL. The very fine line that divides the things a gentleman does do from the things he doesn't do, the things he leaves outsiders to do. You'll one day be the head of an old family. Keep on the right side of the line, Teddy.

TEDDY. But have you ever been in love, Uncle Bill? Real downright, what you may call all-devouring love?

STILL. Scores of times!

TEDDY. (*Turns away disgusted.*) I asked for a little sympathy. (*Going off at back.*) Hush! The old lady! You won't tell her?

STILL. No, Teddy, but——

TEDDY. Honour! Hush!

Enter, at back, LADY PINKNEY.

LADY P. (*Very cordially.*) Ah! my dear Bill, I'm delighted! Don't go, Teddy!

(TEDDY *is sneaking off, at back.*)

STILL. Ah, Madge, my darling! (*Kissing*

each other very cordially.) I'm very, very glad to see you.

LADY P. Teddy, where have you been all the afternoon?

TEDDY. I've been—ruminating.

LADY P. But you were told off to help the Blenkinsops at their stall?

TEDDY. With Trixie Blenkinsop? Thank you. I told myself off to scuttle.

LADY P. They're all waiting for you at the raffle.

TEDDY. Oh, very well. I'll go, but I've had just about enough of this Blenkinsop bevy. I begin to say, "Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness!" (*Exit sulkily, at back.*)

LADY P. That wretched boy! What shall I do with him? If only Bevis had been the elder! You're earlier than you expected.

STILL. The express was pulled up at Pattersham, so I caught that, took my traps up to the Hall; and they sent me on here. Well, Madge, you're looking wonderfully young and charming.

LADY P. It must be my troubles and worries that preserve me. I hope you haven't come to add to them.

STILL. Only with a view of making you still younger and more charming.

LADY P. No, Bill, I don't want any compliments. (*Taking out her watch.*) The Bishop's

address begins in five minutes, but I'll give you a short one, meantime. (*Half serious, half jest.*) Now, Bill, I sent for you to come to Shanctonbury because I trust you're going to settle down at last into a steady, respectable member of society. You're well over forty. Surely we're not going to have any more escapades? I've trouble enough with my boys—what with the impossibility of being severe enough to please Bevis, and easy-going enough to please Teddy, my life is a burden to me. Pinkney is still in Australia, and his steward, Chaytor, is with him; so all the business of the estate falls on me. And I assure you that, however fond I am of you, and however much you may stand in need of my watchfulness, I've no time now to look after you, and keep you out of mischief,

STILL. My dear Madge, as you say, I'm over forty, and I really believe I am now arriving at an age when I shall soon be able to take care of myself, and keep myself out of mischief.

LADY P. I hope so. That reminds me—we're likely to have something of a scandal in Shanctonbury——

STILL. Indeed!

LADY P. Mrs. Wren has come back.

STILL. Wren?

LADY P. Oh, you weren't at Shanctonbury during the time——

STILL. No. Never met her. Wren? Wren?! What, the Duke of Savona? The puff-box?

LADY P. Yes. Now, Bill, promise me you won't meet her!

STILL. Oh, I won't. Now that was a most interesting affair. Cat of a woman, the Duchess of Savona. I hear she worried the poor Duke into his grave——

LADY P. No—he died of German measles.

STILL. I should like to know the real history of that puff-box——

LADY P. Samways is dining with us to-night; he's coming on purpose to explain the whole affair. And I've asked Caroline Fewings.

STILL. Poor Carrie! Do you remember I proposed to Carrie five years ago? Lucky escape—I mean for her!

LADY P. I don't think so. Caroline has seven thousand a year. Now Bill, think what comfort it would be to us if you would a——

STILL. Marry Carrie Fewings?

LADY P. Well, I don't wish to be premature; but you have six months before you while Pinkney is away. Virtually you will be the head of the family. What a chance to employ these six months—in——

STILL. In—what?

LADY P. In reforming yourself generally—guiding my boys——

STILL. I will. I don't mind doing any amount of general reformation, and as for guiding your boys—why only five minutes ago I discovered myself giving the very best advice to Teddy.

LADY P. What about?

STILL. His love affairs. Just a word—keep a very sharp look-out on Teddy.

LADY P. Bill! Surely—he hasn't taken up with another of them?

STILL. I mustn't say, but—keep a very sharp look-out on Teddy.

LADY P. There's another of them! I feel sure there is! (*A school-bell rings in the distance.*) What can I do with that wretched, wretched boy? There's the bell for the Bishop's address. Will you come?

STILL. I don't feel particularly in need of spiritual refreshment, but bodily—I haven't had any lunch.

(*Looking amongst the things on refreshment counter*).

LADY P. You'll find something there! (*Bell rings again*). I must go. Dinner at eight. (*Turns back as she goes off at back.*) (*Very imperatively.*) Bill, remember you are not to know this Mrs. Wren!

STILL. (*At refreshment counter.*) Of course not. (*Exit* LADY PINKNEY *at back.*) Of course not!

(*Busies himself at refreshment counter, eating a morsel or two.* CHARLIE *enters left with a cord; he goes to the parcels he had previously left, and begins tying them together.*)

STILL. (*eating a bun*). Hey! Hey! Somebody has been going a buster in aid of the curates. Whose parcels are those, my lad?

CHARLIE (*tying them up*). They belong to a young lady what's come to live at the Mount—

STILL. Mrs. Wren?

CHARLIE. I don't know her name. Ah! (*Beaming with calf-love on* JULIA, *who enters left.*)

(STILLINGFLEET *summons his resolution, turns away from her, goes on eating his bun, glancing around every now and then to look at her.*)

JULIA. Oh, Charlie, it's going to rain. You'd better leave the parcels, and I'll send my maid for them.

CHARLIE. (*Disappointed—almost in tears.*) I hope you won't deprive me of the honour, Miss. I'll pledge my word they shan't get wet.

JULIA. Oh, very well, Charlie, take them to the Mount. And Charlie (*taking out her purse*), I'm sure you're a very good boy, and a great comfort to your mother, aren't you, Charlie?

CHARLIE. I hope so, Miss. I'll strive for your sake—

JULIA. Then there's half-a-crown for you, Charlie.

CHARLIE (*declining it*). I couldn't take money from you, Miss. I should despise myself. I ain't actuated by mercenary motives, Miss.

(*Goes off left slowly, burdened with parcels, gazing at her with helpless calf-love.* JULIA, *who has taken no notice of* STILLINGFLEET, *is following him left; as she is going off,* STILLINGFLEET *makes a little start and stops her.*)

STILL. A—I beg your pardon—you've left your umbrella——

(*Pointing to the umbrella* MISS FEWINGS *has left against the table left.*)

JULIA. No—thanks—it isn't mine——

(*Exit, left.* STILLINGFLEET *shows slight annoyance, and then creeps jauntily up to left entrance to look after her, but just as he gets there, she suddenly returns, purse in hand and there is a pause of great embarrassment between them.*)

JULIA. I beg pardon——

STILL. I beg pardon——

JULIA. I've just remembered that I haven't

paid for a cup of very bad stale tea that I had. They told me the charge was a shilling, and that I was to leave the money on the counter.

(*She takes a shilling out of her purse, places it carefully on the counter, again turns and is going off.*)

STILL. I'm afraid I'm open to the same charge of forgetfulness. I've had two biscuits, half a stale bun, and a glass of sour lemonade. Can you help me to estimate my liabilities?

JULIA. I'm afraid I can't. But in the cause of charity, one cannot be too charitable.

(*She is going off left.*)

STILL (*stopping her*). A—may I ask who keeps this stall?

JULIA. Lady Pinkney, I believe.

STILL. My sister!

JULIA. Your sister? You are Mr. Stillingfleet?

STILL. Yes.

(JULIA *bows very slightly and goes off left. He again follows her up, but just as he gets to the opening there is a little clap of thunder, and* JULIA *rushes back with a little scream.*)

STILL. You're frightened?

JULIA. Oh, no. A little startled. I'm afraid it's going to rain——

STILL (*looking off*). I'm afraid it's going to

pour. Hadn't you better wait for a few minutes?

(*Placing a chair for her near the table left.* JULIA *sits demurely. He goes to refreshment counter and again looks amongst the refreshments, occasionally turning around to glance at her.*)

STILL. I think that's a very fine sentiment of yours——

JULIA. Sentiment?

STILL. "In the cause of charity one cannot be too charitable." If I leave five shillings on the counter, shall I have risen to the occasion, do you think?

JULIA. It would be most generous, I should say.

(STILLINGFLEET *takes out his purse and counts five shillings, laying them carefully on the counter next to hers. The rain comes pelting down on the outside of the tent.*)

STILL. I told you it was going to pour.

JULIA. We are fortunate to be under shelter.

STILL. Yes. (*Pause of embarrassment. He nibbles a bit of bun and turns around to look at her with admiration.*) I can't congratulate my sister on the quality of her refreshments.

JULIA. No?

STILL. You said your cup of tea was very bad.

JULIA. Horrid! And I had such a headache!

STILL. (*sympathizingly*). A headache! Now I wonder if it would be possible to get you a cup of fresh tea? (*Going around to back of counter.*)

JULIA. (*At table.*) I am a little thirsty. But pray don't trouble—perhaps there's a little fruit?

STILL. I wonder where these people keep their reserve stock. (*Looking under counter—rummaging about, suddenly exclaims.*) Ah! Ah! (*Triumphantly brings out the dish of strawberries and cream.*)

JULIA. What very fine strawberries!

STILL. Yes, and so early in the season. (*Placing them on her table.*) Now! Sugar? (*Taking sifted sugar from counter.*) And then—charity will begin at home.

JULIA. I haven't tasted strawberries this season.

STILL. (*seating himself.*) Neither have I.

JULIA. Shouldn't one wish——?

STILL. I suppose one should. (*Pause.*) Have you wished?

JULIA. Yes. Have you?

STILL. Yes. (*The rain comes pelting down.*) I hope you haven't very far to go.

JULIA. Some little distance. I live at The Mount.

STILL. Oh. Then you are——

JULIA. I am Mrs. Wren.

STILL. Oh—Oh—(*Pause of embarrassment.*) That's a very fine one.

(*Pointing to a large strawberry.*)

JULIA (*taking it.*) Thank you. But you're eating none yourself. That seems to be a ripe one.

STILL. (*taking it.*) Thank you! But——

(*Pause of embarrassment. The rain comes down in torrents outside.* MISS FEWINGS *appears at back, left, as if she had just concluded a run for shelter. She is about to enter, but stops indignant on seeing the pair eating the strawberries. She stays a moment watching the scene, and then goes off indignantly on the opposite side, unnoticed by* STILLINGFLEET *and* JULIA.)

STILL. (*looking at* JULIA *very admiringly.*) You were saying—(*Pushing the strawberries towards her.*) Something about charity, wasn't it?

JULIA. How very little true charity one meets with!

STILL. Very little indeed.

JULIA. By charity, I don't mean mere money giving——

STILL. No—No——

JULIA. I mean looking over our neighbours' faults——

STILL. Yes—shutting your eyes to his little failings——

JULIA. Yes—refusing to believe any malicious gossip that may be circulated about him, or her—

STILL. Now that's very large-hearted of you.

JULIA. In fact, my definition of true charity would be this—"Not merely refusing to believe idle scandal, but even to listen to it for one moment."

STILL. That's a perfect definition of charity. Now why is there so little charity of that description in the world?

JULIA. Ah why? Why is it that people are so eager to condemn, so ready to put the worst interpretations on every little—unfortunate occurrence?

STILL. It shows a very bad ugly side of human nature. (*Pointing to a strawberry.*) That's a little beauty.

JULIA. Oh, please—no more——

STILL. Yes, you must indeed. Some kind thoughtful soul must have placed these strawberries there especially for you.

JULIA. You think so? Then you must help me eat them!

STILL. I forget what we were talking about?

JULIA. We were trying to account for the absence of true charity in the world.

STILL. It's lamentable! Why is it?

JULIA. I think sufficient allowance is not made for temperament.

STILL. Decidedly sufficient allowance is not made for temperament. I've always felt that.

JULIA. Nor for the peculiar circumstances in which one may happen to be placed.

STILL. I've felt that too—very strongly.

JULIA. Now I know a dear little woman who went on a summer trip to Norway——

STILL. Yes——

(*Offering her strawberries.*)

JULIA. On a yacht——

STILL. On a yacht——

JULIA. No, thank you——

(*Declining strawberries.*)

STILL. Oh, you must indeed. Yes, "dear little woman who went to Norway—on a yacht ——"

JULIA. I'm sure from her character she was absolutely incapable of the least indiscretion——

STILL. Absolutely incapable!

JULIA. But circumstances seemed to point the other way—and—gossip (*with a sympathetic shrug and gesture and sigh*) it broke her heart.

STILL. Shameful! (*Eating a strawberry.*)

JULIA. Yes, quite broke her heart. She lives in Paris now.

STILL. Poor little creature!

(*Eating another strawberry.*)

JULIA. I believe some time ago, some good-natured friends actually started some absurd story about me.

STILL. Impossible!

JULIA. It is quite true.

STILL. I begin to be ashamed of my species.

JULIA. I never took the least notice of it.

STILL. Much the best way!

JULIA. I merely let it die a natural death.

STILL. Quite right!

JULIA (*rising.*) I think the rain has left off.

(*Going left, looking off.* MRS. BEVIS *and* MISS FEWINGS *look in at back right, and watch.*)

STILL. No—(*looking off*). It's still raining a little.

JULIA. Oh, it won't hurt, and I must really be getting home——

STILL. Must you? It's still spotting. Ah! (*Seeing* MISS FEWINGS' *umbrella.*) Here's an umbrella. Now I wonder who is the owner of this—at any rate we'll borrow it, and—shall I see you across to the school-room?

JULIA. Oh, I'm taking you out of your way—

STILL. Not at all——

(*Opens the umbrella and takes her off very politely left.* MISS FEWINGS *and* MRS. BEVIS *come down, drenched through, and with draggled petticoats* —MRS. BEVIS *comes up to the empty plate of strawberries, holds it up.*)

MRS. B. Mrs. Galer's strawberries!

(MISS FEWINGS *goes towards left, and makes a feeble little gasp and clutch after* STILLINGFLEET *and* JULIA.)

MISS F. My new umbrella!

CURTAIN.

(*Two months pass between Acts* 1 *and* 2.)

ACT II

SCENE—Morning room at Mrs. Wren's, The Mount, Shanctonbury. A very prettily furnished room in an old house. A large bow window at back, giving access to an old English garden, and showing beyond a small country town with Cathedral towers rising. A door up stage, left. A fireplace, right, banked with flowers. A small table down stage, left, with chairs on each side. A larger table, right, on which are a heap of law books, amongst them two or three formidable old volumes. A small low sofa in front of table, right, with a large hideous green woollen antimacassar on its arm. The room otherwise is very daintily and prettily furnished, nick-nacks, flowers, etc.

TIME—An August afternoon, about four.

Discover JULIA, *in a pretty afternoon dress, seated above table, right, poring over the law books; she shows signs of being greatly puzzled.*

JULIA (*reading*). "It is not possible in any Christian state for any person, whether royal or not, to contract a marriage which shall be good in law, and at the same time leave such person free to marry again while the first husband or wife is still living."

(*Turns, puzzled, to another book, sighs and looks worried.* TRIXIE BLENKINSOP *has sidled into the window from the garden on the left side, stands there as if afraid to come in.*)

TRIXIE. I'm here, Mrs. Wren.

JULIA. Trixie! When I told you never to come here again unless Mrs. Blenkinsop knew.

TRIXIE. She does know that I'm here.

(*Coming down.*)

JULIA. (*Astonished.*) What?

(*Jumps up and goes to* TRIXIE.)

TRIXIE. And my uncle knows, too.

JULIA. (*Astonished.*) The Bishop knows you have come to see me! (*Overjoyed.*) My dear Trixie! (*Kisses her.*) How did you manage it?

TRIXIE. Well, I was determined to come and see you. You know you can generally get what you want if you only go on my plan.

JULIA. What is your plan?

TRIXIE. Our old nurse taught it to me. She said to me, "My cherub"—she used to call me her cherub—"My cherub," she said, "if you want your way in this world you must let folks see that you mean to scratch first (*showing her nails*), and scratch hardest, and scratch longest, and then folks generally won't scratch you at all. (*Tri-*

umphantly showing her nails.) Nobody ever scratches me!

JULIA. But you didn't scratch——

TRIXIE. Auntie? Yes—figuratively. I began with having a furious row with her.

JULIA. My dear Trixie, you can't go through life having furious rows with everybody——

TRIXIE. Oh, I love it! Then aunt had hysterics, then uncle came in, then I had worse hysterics. I can always have hysterics when it's necessary, you know——

JULIA. Well?

TRIXIE. Well, I worked poor old auntie up, and I worked myself up, and uncle lifted up his hands, like this (*lifting up her hands*), and looked like a dear injured old baa lamb, and aunt got worse, and I got worse, till I had one desperate fit, and I shrieked out, "I can't help it! I'm going to The Mount to see Mrs. Wren, if I die for it!" And here I am.

JULIA. (*Very gravely.*) I'm very sorry and very angry with you. (*Turns from* TRIXIE, *seats herself at table,* TRIXIE *comes up to her coaxingly.*) No, Trixie. You know how much I love you, but I can never see you, or speak to you again.

TRIXIE. Dear Mrs. Wren.

(*Trying to embrace* JULIA.)

JULIA. No. Please don't! What will your

dear aunt think of me? What will the dear Bishop think of me? They will think I encourage you to come here.

TRIXIE (*trying to embrace* JULIA). Dear Mrs. Wren! Do forgive me!

JULIA. I don't think I can. Unless—you——

TRIXIE. Yes?

JULIA. Go back to the Palace at once, and tell your aunt that I was very angry with you for coming against her wish, and that I sent you back to beg her pardon——

TRIXIE. Beg her pardon! No, if I once beg her pardon I shall never be able to do anything with her in future.

JULIA. Very well. Then our friendship is at an end. Good-bye.

(TRIXIE *goes sulkily up to window, then suddenly rushes back to* JULIA.)

TRIXIE. I will beg her pardon if you'll kiss me, and say you forgive me.

JULIA. (*Kisses her.*) I forgive you. Now go at once. (TRIXIE *goes to back.*)

JULIA. And, Trixie, you might tell Mrs. Blenkinsop how very pretty her green antimacassar looks on my sofa——

TRIXIE. (*Has a fit of laughter.*) Oh, I say! (*Exit at back.*)

MEADE, *a parlour maid, enters at door announcing* MR. SAMWAYS.

Enter SAMWAYS. *Exit* MEADE.

SAMWAYS. Ah, my dear girl! How are you?

JULIA. I'm very well—except—

(*Looking at the law books.*)

SAMWAYS. Have you found anything there?

(*Pointing to the law books.*)

JULIA. No. The laws relating to morganatic marriages are in such a muddle. Not one of them seems to meet my case.

SAMWAYS. (*With a little sniff of incredulity.*) No, I dare say not. (*Shutting up the law books.*) Give it up, my dear Julia. The Duke of Savona was already married. Now listen—where is it? Ah! (*Reading from one of the books.*) "A morganatic marriage does not differ from any other. It is a legal marriage, and contracting any other while it stands is bigamy." (*Shuts the book with a bang.*) Bigamy!

JULIA. Yes—of course. I wasn't thinking of that kind of morganatic marriage.

SAMWAYS. Drop it, my dear Julia! You'll get into very deep water if you don't.

JULIA. But I'm in very deep water already. I've been in Shanctonbury over two months, and nobody calls on me.

SAMWAYS. Nobody?

JULIA. Only Mr. Teddy Pinkney and Mr. Stillingfleet.

SAMWAYS. Lady Pinkney is going to call on you.

JULIA. Lady Pinkney! When?

SAMWAYS. To-day. I've just got wind of it, and hurried up to warn you.

JULIA. Warn me?

SAMWAYS. There's a very strong faction against you in Shanctonbury, headed by the Bevis Pinkneys. I've saved the situation for you as far as I could. But it's getting out of my hands.

JULIA. What ought I to do?

SAMWAYS. Lady Pinkney is coming here with a fixed resolution to get at the truth. If you mean to live in Shanctonbury, I should tell her all about it.

JULIA. The puff-box?

SAMWAYS. Yes. Dish it up as well as you can, but tell her the complete story, or at least *a* complete story.

JULIA. (*Looks longingly at the law books which* SAMWAYS *is getting under his arm.*) Even if there had been—I won't say a regular morganatic marriage—but (*looking anxiously at him*) something—equivalent to a morganatic marriage?

SAMWAYS. (*Sharp, relentless.*) When? Where? Civil or religious? Who were the witnesses?

JULIA (*reproachfully*). I see you don't believe in me.

Enter MEADE.

MEADE. (*Announces.*) Lady Pinkney!

(SAMWAYS *catches up his hat.*)

JULIA. You won't run away——

Enter LADY PINKNEY *at door.*

JULIA. (*Advances cordially.*) Dear Lady Pinkney! Bring some tea, Meade.

(*Exit* MEADE.)

LADY P. (*shaking hands cordially*). My dear Mrs. Wren, how d'ye do? Ah, Mr. Samways.

(*Nodding to* SAMWAYS.)

JULIA. It's so kind of you to call. Won't you sit here? (*Wheeling armchair for her, making cushions, etc., comfortable for her.*) There! (LADY PINKNEY *sits.*) Cousin Tom, you aren't going?

SAMWAYS. (*Has collected his law books and is sneaking off.*) Well—I——

JULIA. Sit down. (*Makes* SAMWAYS *sit.* SAMWAYS *is very uncomfortable.*) I was beginning to think my Shanctonbury friends had forgotten me.

(*Seating herself next* LADY PINKNEY.)

LADY P. Oh no, dear. I'm afraid we've been thinking and talking a great deal about you.

(SAMWAYS *fidgets.*)

JULIA. Then I'm sure you've been thinking

and saying all the kind things you possibly could.

LADY P. Well, dear, perhaps it wouldn't be wise to repeat all—especially before——

(*Glancing at* SAMWAYS.)

JULIA. I've no secrets from Cousin Tom—I was just consulting him on an important point of law, wasn't I, Cousin Tom?

SAMWAYS. Yes——

LADY P. Indeed!

JULIA. It seems that on this particular point, the law itself is in a perfect chaos, isn't it?

(*Taking up one of the books and looking to* SAMWAYS *for encouragement.*)

SAMWAYS. (*Looks blank and impassive.*) Yes——

LADY P. What is this particular point?

SAMWAYS. (*Jumps up.*) Dear me!

JULIA. What's the matter?

SAMWAYS. I've got a town council meeting. I've kept them all waiting. Lady Pinkney, please excuse me. Julia, my dear, about that point I'm sure you'd better leave it until I've ascertained what the law really is.

JULIA. You think my lips had better be closed?

SAMWAYS. Certainly, on that particular point. Not one word about it! Good-bye, Lady Pinkney. Good-bye, my dear! Must go! Must go!

(*Hurries off at back.*)

LADY P. (*Watches him off relieved.*) Ah!

(*Turns to* JULIA *with a very determined manner.*) Now, my dear Mrs. Wren, I'm going to have a little quiet friendly talk (*drawing her chair closer to* JULIA) on a matter of vital importance to you.

JULIA. Yes——

LADY P. So I'm sure it's much better for us to be alone.

Enter MEADE *with tea things, which she puts on table, left.*

JULIA. Yes. We women understand each other so much better than men understand us, don't we?

(LADY PINKNEY *shows annoyance at* MEADE'S *presence.*)

JULIA. You'll take some tea, won't you?

LADY P. Yes, if you please.

(*Glancing at* MEADE.)

JULIA. For genuine sympathy woman must always go to woman. There is, or there should be a kind of freemasonry between us——

LADY P. Yes—— (*Looking at* MEADE.) It won't be necessary for her to wait, will it?

JULIA. Oh, no. Leave the tea things, Meade. (*Going to tea table, left. Exit* MEADE, *left.*) I always prefer to pour out my tea for my visitors.

(LADY PINKNEY *drags her chair up to* JULIA.)

(JULIA *pouring out.*)

This is a very delicate blend of Lapsang and Kaisow.

LADY P. Lapsang and Kaisow. Thank you. Very little milk.

JULIA. One lump or two?

LADY P. One small lump, please.

JULIA. I always take one small lump.

LADY P. Now to return to our conversation. You are surprised your old friends haven't called upon you?

JULIA. I did think it a little unkind. By the way, I must tell you I'm not responsible for Mr. Edwin Pinkney's visits here.

LADY P. (*Upset.*) My son Edwin has been calling upon you!

JULIA. Yes—three times in all. You didn't know?

LADY P. Not a word. (*Is much upset.*) I think it most inconsiderate of him——

JULIA. I told him so. And I asked him as a favour to me not to call again unless you knew.

LADY P. Thank you. Edwin is a great trial to me——

JULIA. He has a very sweet nature——

LADY P. He has simply no sense of what is due to our position——

JULIA. He does seem to stand in need of a little firm tender guidance. Now if you could only bring about some suitable attachment——

LADY P. Yes, yes. (*Hurriedly changes the subject.*) May I ask how Edwin became acquainted with you?

JULIA. Mr. Stillingfleet presented him to me after the service at Saint Radegonde's a few Sunday mornings ago.

LADY P. (*Annoyed.*) Oh! I heard that my brother had been calling upon you—rather frequently?

JULIA. No—no—not too frequently. He's fond of botany like myself.

LADY P. (*Astonished.*) Botany?!

JULIA. Wildflowers.

LADY P. Wildflowers?! My dear Mrs. Wren —now do let me warn you—in the strictest confidence, my brother is a most charming man, and I'm passionately fond of him——

JULIA. And he simply adores you!

LADY P. Yes, yes—but for your own sake let me beg you not to encourage his visits here.

JULIA. You think Mr. Stillingfleet is not—not quite a nice acquaintance for me?

LADY P. Well, I won't say that. But he is simply the most erratic impossible creature where women are concerned. I'm speaking solely in your interests, solely for your good——

JULIA. I'm sure you are!

LADY P. Now please let my brother plainly

understand that he will not be welcome here in the future.

JULIA. Certainly, if you wish it. But I've so few friends——

LADY P. Yes, and that brings me to the object of my visit. Now, my dear——(*drawing her chair closer to* JULIA *in a very determined way.*) I'm sure you won't mind my speaking to you in the very plainest way——

JULIA. Dear Lady Pinkney, I wish it. What's the use of having friends if they shirk their duty of showing you your faults?

LADY P. Yes, yes. Now do you intend to remain in Shanctonbury?

JULIA. I've not quite made up my mind——

LADY P. Because, if you wish to leave Shanctonbury, I think I could find you a very desirable tenant for this house.

JULIA. How good of you!

LADY P. Miss Fewings finds her little place too small, and she would pay you a very handsome rental, and take a long lease.

JULIA. Dear Miss Fewings! Will you thank her, and say she shall have the first refusal, if I do leave Shanctonbury?

LADY P. But you're not sure?

JULIA. Not quite.

LADY P. Because, my dear, now I'm going to be frank—if you don't leave Shanctonbury, the

question arises, Do you intend to remain as you are, outside all your old circle, outside our pleasant little society, such as it is, in your present very uncomfortable position? For I imagine it is a very uncomfortable position.

JULIA. Oh, very uncomfortable, I assure you. But I've made the pleasantest little overtures to everybody. There's the new Bishop—he hasn't exchanged a single word with me——

LADY P. My dear, you must own it would be impossible for the Bishop to know you at present.

JULIA. Why? If I'm half as wicked as some people try to make out, surely I'm the very person whom the Bishop ought to know.

LADY P. Spiritually, perhaps——

JULIA. Well, "spiritually" would do. I don't wish to make nice distinctions.

LADY P. It's not a question of knowing you spiritually. It's a question of knowing you socially. We are all willing to know you spiritually, and to give you the best advice, and——

JULIA. And cross my name off your visiting list, and cut me when you meet me, and talk all sorts of scandal about me when I'm out of sight. I beg your pardon, Lady Pinkney—I didn't mean to say that. But I'm sure you will see that I'm really not a woman to be known spiritually—in that sense. That must remain a luxury for the lower classes. You can give them a tract and

send them into an institution. But you can't quite do that sort of thing with me, can you? I must be known socially, or not at all. Can I give you another cup of tea?

LADY P. No, thank you. It's delicious tea. What blend did you say it was?

JULIA. Lapsang and Kaisow.

LADY P. Lapsang and Kaisow. Where can I get some?

JULIA. My tea merchant blends it especially for me. I'll write him to send you some.

LADY P. Thank you, but really——

JULIA. Oh, quite without prejudice, as the lawyers say.

LADY P. But to return to our conversation—

JULIA. Yes. I think my old friends, and you amongst them, have treated me very shabbily.

LADY P. The matter lies in your own hands.

JULIA. How? (*Getting apprehensive.*)

LADY P. I've not the least curiosity. I don't wish to pry into your affairs. But (*very firmly, drawing her chair a little closer*) you must be aware that certain stories are afloat—Wouldn't it be better to answer them?

JULIA. In what way?

LADY P. Give me the true history of the whole affair.

JULIA. I hope you don't think that I haven't a sufficient answer to all these canards.

LADY P. Oh, I'm sure you have. What is it?

JULIA. (*Is fumbling the law books.*) Well, if a very important question of law had arisen—

LADY P. What question of law?

JULIA. You heard Mr. Samways advising me to say nothing. So you see my lips are closed.

LADY P. But this is not a question of law. This is a question of fact.

JULIA (*getting embarrassed*). What?

LADY P. (*Draws out a piece of paper from her pocket.*) I took the precaution before coming here to obtain certain definite particulars about—a—Well, my dear, you know it is alleged—with what truth I don't know—but it is said that certain articles were discovered in very compromising circumstances—There was a dressing-bag—and a puff-box——

JULIA. I believe it was said that the dressing-bag had my initials—that is quite false.

LADY P. And the puff-box—(*Long pause.*)—you do see the necessity of telling me, don't you?

JULIA. Oh yes—a——

LADY P. The puff-box?

JULIA. Perhaps I'd better begin at the very beginning—

LADY P. Certainly.

JULIA. When I arrived at Venice in May, eighteen-ninety-nine, I was introduced to a most charming——

Enter MEADE, *showing in* MR. STILLINGFLEET.

MEADE. (*Announcing.*) Mr. Stillingfleet.

Enter STILLINGFLEET. *Exit* MEADE.

STILL. (*Enters.*) Ah, good afternoon. I—a—(*Shows great confusion on seeing* LADY PINKNEY.) M a d g e! (*Recovering himself.*) I thought I might catch you here——

LADY P. You thought you might catch me here?

STILL. Yes, dear. I've some news for you—

LADY P. News? What?

STILL. One moment, till I've paid my respects to Mrs. Wren. How d'ye do?

(*Shaking hands cordially.*)

JULIA. How d'ye do? I'm delighted to see you—won't you sit down?

STILL. Thank you. I've called to tell you about that little——a——that——and I'm really pleased to find my sister here. I know she has been intending to call for some time, but she is so busy, aren't you, Madge? What with the estate and her poor people, she's always employed. (*Patting* LADY PINKNEY *on shoulder.*) Never happy unless she's doing some kind thoughtful little neighbourly action like this——Oh, don't deny it, my dear——(*To* JULIA, *patting* LADY PINKNEY.) The kindest and dearest creature in the world. Well now, I wonder if I might beg a cup of tea.

JULIA. (*Goes to tea table.*) Certainly.

LADY P. (*Severely.*) You said you had some news for me.

STILL. Yes. The prodigal has returned.

LADY P. Edwin?

STILL. Pitkin, the under-gardener, says he caught sight of him outside the Railway Hotel.

LADY P. Edwin at the Railway Hotel?

STILL. Pitkin wasn't quite sure.

LADY P. It's impossible. What should Edwin be doing at the Railway Hotel?

(JULIA *gives tea to* STILLINGFLEET.)

STILL. Thank you.

Enter MEADE *with letter on tray which she brings to* JULIA.

MEADE. The messenger is waiting for an answer.

JULIA. (*Takes it.*) Will you allow me?

(*Opens it, has a slight start, shows surprise and perplexity, reads it again; glances at* LADY PINKNEY *and* STILLINGFLEET.)

JULIA. Where is the messenger?

MEADE. In the hall, ma'am.

JULIA. (*To* LADY PINKNEY.) Will you excuse me a minute?

(*Exit* JULIA *with letter, followed by* MEADE.)

LADY P. (*Looks at* STILLINGFLEET *severely.*) You've been studying botany?

STILL. Eh? Yes—yes—a few rudiments. Do you know, Madge, I actually didn't know the names of our commonest wildflowers—bugloss, bladder campion, sticklewort —— Sticklewort? Stipplewort?——Well, there you see I don't know its right name even now. It grows in every hedge-row. It's disgraceful for a man to arrive at my age and not know the name of the simplest wildflowers.

LADY P. (*Serene—severe.*) You've been going to Saint Radegonde's on Sunday mornings.

STILL. Yes—yes—Ah, you see, dear, your good advice has borne fruit at last! After all these years, too! You wouldn't have thought it, would you?

LADY P. But the service there is very low?

STILL. Oh, very low—very low indeed.

LADY P. And Galer is a wretched preacher?

STILL. Shocking, dire, wicked, bad, tiresome preacher, yes——

LADY P. Then why do you go and hear him?

STILL. Well, you see—he—he's got nine children—one of them stutters—stutters? I never heard anybody stutter as—as fluently as that second boy of Galer's—so I thought, "Poor devil! Here's a chance of doing good! I'll give him a turn."

LADY P. (*Very severely.*) Now, Bill, answer me truly, you're fascinated with this Mrs. Wren?

STILL. No—no——

LADY P. You've not been making advances to her?

STILL. No—no——

LADY P. You have no intentions towards her?

STILL. Not the least!

LADY P. Because we shall not know Mrs. Wren in Shanctonbury. Please bear that in mind in regulating your future behaviour to her. We shall not know her.

(TRIXIE'S *voice is heard off in the garden.*)

TRIXIE. Mrs. Wren! Mrs. Wren! I haven't gone yet——

Enters at back to STILLINGFLEET'S *surprise, and* LADY PINKNEY'S *surprise and horror.*

LADY P. Miss Blenkinsop! I cannot believe my eyes!

TRIXIE. Aunt and uncle know that I'm here.

LADY P. Trixie! How can you tell me such a dreadful story?

TRIXIE. (*Shrieks out.*) Oh! Oh! Oh! That's just the same as calling me a—bad name. I may be a horrid naughty girl, Lady Pinkney—And when I'm goaded, as you have just goaded

me, nobody knows how abandoned I can be—I don't know myself. I'm capable of anything! But bad as I am, I do not tell falsehoods, and I allow no one to question my word.

LADY P. (*seizing her by the hand*). Come with me to the Palace at once. I must see the Bishop and Mrs. Blenkinsop about this!

TRIXIE (*dragging away her hand*). No! After what has just passed I cannot be seen in public with you. If you go by the road, I go by the footpath! If you go by the footpath, I go by the road!

(*Marches off at back.*)

STILL. That's the young lady you intend for Teddy?

LADY P. Yes.

STILL. Won't she be rather a handful for him?

LADY P. My dear Bill, we must make haste and marry Teddy to somebody, or I don't know what will happen. And Trixie will have all the Culverstone property. I must run over to the Palace and find out what is the meaning of her visit here! (*Going off at back, turns round.*) You'd better come with me.

STILL. One moment. I've just one question to ask Mrs. Wren——

LADY P. Question to ask her?

STILL. A little technical question in botany.

LADY P. Now Bill, I may trust you?

STILL. (*reproachfully*). My dear Madge——
(*Exit* LADY PINKNEY *at window.* STILLINGFLEET *follows her up.*)

Enter JULIA, *at door, with letter in her hand.*

JULIA. I thought I heard somebody shrieking——

STILL. We had a little scene with Miss Blenkinsop.

JULIA. Trixie! Where is she?

STILL. My sister has taken her back to the Palace.

JULIA. I've just had this most perplexing letter. I think you ought to read it.

STILL. From whom? (*Taking letter.*)

JULIA. Mr. Edwin Pinkney. I didn't like to show it to Lady Pinkney, so I took it outside to answer.

STILL. (*Reads.*) "Railway Hotel, Shanctonbury,—Dear Mrs. Wren, You are the only person in this ghastly place who has ever shown me the least spark of human sympathy. So I hope you won't mind me coming to you in my hour of need. If you are at home will you kindly spare me a few minutes alone? Yours sincerely, Edwin Pinkney."

JULIA. Has he been away from home?

STILL. Yes, for a few days. What did you reply?

JULIA. I wrote him that Lady Pinkney was with me, and I should be pleased to see him in her presence, or alone after she had gone.

STILL. I wonder what fresh scrape Teddy has been getting into.

JULIA. Whatever it is, we must try and help him out of it.

STILL. (*looking at her admiringly*). How good that is of you! (*Approaching her.*) I did a little botanizing yesterday——

JULIA. Ah? In *our* lane—I mean *the* lane?

STILL. It was *our* lane when we had it all to ourselves the other evening. I spent all yesterday afternoon there, looking for that little flower——

JULIA. Which little flower?

STILL. Now what do they call it? I can't remember its Latin name, but in English I fancy they call it (*bending nearer to her*) Love-in-idleness.

JULIA. And you couldn't find it?

STILL. Not a single specimen. Doesn't it take two skilled gardeners to bring it to perfection?

JULIA. Oh no, it's the commonest weed. If two simpletons meet down a lane, in five minutes all the banks blossom with it.

STILL. The banks were barren enough yesterday. Why didn't you come?

JULIA. I thought it might not be quite, quite prudent.

STILL. Prudent? Is there any word in the language that comes with so bad a grace from a woman's lips as "Prudent"!

JULIA. Oh, it's a vile word, and we hate it quite as much as you do. Still it's an eminently respectable, churchgoing sort of word, and every nice woman is obliged to keep it somewhere handy.

STILL. In the dictionary?

JULIA. Oh, no! "Prudence" is far too useful a word to be left in the dictionary.

STILL. Useful? What for?

JULIA. To play gooseberry—when we go botanizing.

STILL. We'll take it with us to-morrow, shall we?

(JULIA *smiles and shakes her head at him.*)

STILL. Then we'll go botanizing without it, shall we?

(JULIA *smiles and shakes her head at him.*)

JULIA. Alas! Our studies in botany must cease.

STILL. Cease?! Am I such a dull, backward scholar?

JULIA. Dull? Backward? You're far too

advanced for me. You're getting quite out of hand. I must really dismiss you. I've taught you all the botany I know.

STILL. Shall we begin some other science?

JULIA. Shall we begin to be serious? When you came in I'd just made a promise to Lady Pinkney——

STILL. A promise?

JULIA. To let you understand you will not be welcome here for the future.

STILL. What business is it of Lady Pinkney's?

JULIA. She doesn't take kindly to your botanizing.

STILL. Ah! how inconsistent you all are! All my life my dear sister has been lecturing me on my want of interest in rustic pleasures and delights. "Bill, why don't you take an interest in simple country sights and sounds?" And now when I say, "Very well, lay me in the lap of mother nature, and let me gather the roses and bladder-campions while I may," is she pleased? No. She calls and cuts off my botany lessons. The same with my going to church. "Bill, why don't you at least so far conform to outward respectability as to be seen in your place at church on Sunday mornings?" And I think, "That's good advice! I'll give poor Galer a turn." Does she welcome the returning penitent back to the fold? No, she runs amuck at Galer's doctrines, and

knocks theology off my list as an unnecessary extra—like botany. Now isn't she irrational? (JULIA *shakes her head at him and smiles.*) My pretty teacher, (*coming closer to her*) you don't really mean to dismiss me?

JULIA. I've promised Lady Pinkney.

STILL. Lady Pinkney! Surely you and I can be allowed to choose our own friends.

JULIA. Can we? It doesn't seem that I can choose my own friends. I've been here over two months and I haven't a single friend in the place.

STILL. You have one.

JULIA. No. A man cannot be a woman's friend unless—

STILL. Unless?

JULIA. Unless a woman has heaps of women-friends besides him; women-friends who won't be jealous of her, and won't misunderstand his friendship? I have no women-friends—not one. And our friendship would be misunderstood in Shanctonbury—horribly misunderstood.

STILL. It shall not be misunderstood. I'll let everybody know that you are my friend.

JULIA. (*Smiles and shakes her head.*) That would only make me more disliked and suspected than I am already. No! I must dismiss you, dear pupil, and leave Shanctonbury.

STILL. Leave Shanctonbury!

JULIA. Lady Pinkney brought me a very

handsome offer from Miss Fewings to take this house for a number of years.

STILL. Miss Fewings! You surely won't let The Mount to her.

JULIA. Yes, I think. If I stay here and remain friends with you, I shall only estrange you from your sister. I shouldn't like to do that. I should like still less to stay in Shanctonbury and not be friends with you.

STILL. You shall stay in Shanctonbury, and you shall be friends with me. (*She smiles and shakes her head.*) Yes, my chief friend, (*She smiles and shakes her head.*) my only friend! My wife! Nobody can misunderstand that!

JULIA. Thank you very much. But I must not accept you—for your own sake.

STILL. Ah, let me be the judge of that. Be my wife, for my sake——

JULIA. But if in after years——?

STILL. Let after years take care of themselves.

JULIA. What shall I say?

STILL. Nothing. All is said. (*Kisses her.*) We'll go botanizing to-morrow (*She nods.*) without that old fossil chaperon "Prudence"?

JULIA. Oh, no! No! We must take her with us more than ever now. Don't you see that?

STILL. Yes, you're right. And perhaps it will be better not to announce our engagement to my sister, just for the time, eh?

JULIA. I shall leave it all to you. Tell Lady Pinkney and your other friends just when you think the right moment has come for it.

STILL. That won't be to-day.

Enter MEADE *at door.*

MEADE. (*Announces.*) Mr. Edwin Pinkney.

Enter TEDDY *at door, in long summer overcoat and low hat, as if he had just come off a journey.*

(*Exit* MEADE.)

TEDDY. (*Embarrassed, looking round apprehensively.*) Hillo! Uncle Bill! How d'ye do, Mrs. Wren? (*Looking round as he advances to shake hands with her.*) I saw the old lady going down the road.

JULIA. Yes, she has gone. How d'ye do.

TEDDY. Thanks, I'm a bit slack, off colour.

JULIA. I'm so sorry——

TEDDY. Thanks awfully. (*Shakes her hand, retains it. Stands embarrassed, and maunders on.*) Thanks. It's this hole of a place, (*indicating the city from the window*) and then there's the old lady—and all the Blenkinsop gang—Well, it's a gruesome state of affairs, isn't it? However, I hope I've got one true friend in Shanctonbury. (*Wringing* JULIA'S *hand, which he has retained.*)

JULIA. (*Very much embarrassed.*) You have indeed.

(*Glances helplessly around at* STILLINGFLEET, *who comes up to them.*)

TEDDY. That's why I came straight here. I thought I might find you alone.

(*Glancing at* STILLINGFLEET.)

STILL. How are you, Teddy? Got back to Shanctonbury?

TEDDY. Yes.

STILL. Mother know you're here?

TEDDY. No.

STILL. That's bad, isn't it?

TEDDY. No, not under the circumstances.

STILL. What circumstances?

TEDDY. Well—I should like to consult Mrs. Wren—privately, if——

STILL. You can't do better. Trust her thoroughly, my boy. (*Going off at back.*)

JULIA. Mr. Stillingfleet, you won't go very far, in case we need your advice.

(*He makes her a sign and goes off at window.*)

TEDDY. (*Embarrassed, hesitates, at length plunges.*) You know—I'm in a situation that peculiarly demands the exercise of a little feminine tact and sympathy. There's nothing that picks a man up like feminine sympathy. (JULIA *makes a sympathetic assent.*) Especially when

he's in the midst of events that may shape themselves into a—into a kind of social revolution——

JULIA. (*Alarmed.*) Social revolution! You're not going to head a social revolution?

TEDDY. Yes—in a minor kind of way (JULIA *looks helplessly round for* STILLINGFLEET.) that is, with your aid and sympathy——

JULIA. Oh, but I've no sort of sympathy with social revolutions!

TEDDY. But it's for your especial benefit——

JULIA. My benefit? I'm sure nobody ever benefits by social revolutions.

TEDDY. You would, if you only had the courage to face it.

JULIA. Courage? I don't understand.

(*Looking round for* STILLINGFLEET.)

TEDDY. When you came to live in Shanctonbury, what did all the Shanctonbury dowagers do? Did they call on you? Did they put your name on their committees, and ask you for subscriptions? Did they invite you to their muffin-meetings? How have the Blenkinsops treated you? And I thought you might like to take a neat little revenge on the whole gang.

JULIA. How?

TEDDY. Well, with my help and countenance, and—(*Embarrassed.*) the help and countenance of some friends I am about to introduce into the neighbourhood——

JULIA. You're going to introduce some friends into the neighbourhood?

TEDDY. Yes—rather jolly people—in their way. And I thought we might get up a nice select little coterie of social outsiders, and snap our fingers at everybody.

JULIA. But social outsiders don't form nice little coteries, do they? I'm sure they don't.

TEDDY. Oh yes they do—in a sense. Byron and Shelley were social outsiders——

JULIA. Yes, but nobody called on Byron or Shelley—at least not on the ladies who—a—who a—not when they were writing their most beautiful poetry.

TEDDY. (*Very much disappointed.*) But I —a—wanted to introduce my friends to you——

JULIA. I should be delighted, but—I'll call Mr. Stillingfleet.

TEDDY. No—Uncle Bill has got no real sympathy, and it's a little human sympathy I want in the present juncture.

JULIA. Juncture! What juncture?

TEDDY. (*Solemnly.*) Mrs. Wren, I've always tried to behave in a strictly honourable way towards women—I'm not boring you?

JULIA. No—no—go on.

TEDDY. And I mean to act in a strictly honourable way towards this one.

JULIA. Which one?

TEDDY. This one. I'm not going to be ashamed of her. Especially as I'm going to marry her next month.

JULIA. What? You're going to be married! And Lady Pinkney doesn't know?

TEDDY. No. You see, I thought the old lady might shy a bit at Rosie's mamma—so I've come to you—as a friend——

JULIA. Rosie? Who is this young lady? Does she live in Shanctonbury?

TEDDY. No—she's never been here before—except on the day of the curate's bazaar. I brought her and her mother down then, so that they might see Shanctonbury in all its glory.

JULIA. Where are they now?

TEDDY. Just outside in the road waiting for your decision.

JULIA. You must tell Lady Pinkney about her at once, and I must tell Mr. Stillingfleet.

TEDDY. No—if you don't allow me to bring her here as my *fiancée,* I shall simply cart her back to town, and say nothing to anybody till it's all over. But I brought her here on purpose to introduce her to you.

JULIA. (*Embarrassed.*) Well—of course I should be delighted if—if Mr. Stillingfleet were present.

TEDDY. I don't trust Uncle Bill——

JULIA. Oh, I'm sure you may. Now go and

bring her in, and I'll tell Mr. Stillingfleet. Yes, yes, he must know!

TEDDY. Well—a—all right—but you know it's feminine sympathy I want and——

(*Exit at door, left.*)

JULIA. (*Shows great perplexity, goes to window, calls.*) Mr. Stillingfleet!

STILL. (*Enters at window.*) Yes—(*looks round for* TEDDY.) My sister has come back from the Palace. She wants to see you about Trixie. I haven't told her Teddy was here. Where is Teddy?

(*Looking round for* TEDDY. JULIA *shows great perplexity.*)

LADY PINKNEY *enters at window.*

LADY P. I wish to have two minutes' important conversation with you. May I come in?

JULIA. Yes—do, please. (*Rings bell.*)

LADY P. I've taken Miss Blenkinsop to the Palace. I believe she has been in the habit of visiting you here?

JULIA. It has been quite against my wish.

LADY P. Yes, so she said.

Enter MEADE *at door, left.*

JULIA. Oh, Meade, if anyone comes, please show them into the dining-room, and say that I will be there in a few minutes.

MEADE. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit.*)

LADY P. I was certainly not aware when I was here just now that Miss Blenkinsop had been visiting you. That puts a new complexion on the object of my visit. Now, if you're going to remain in our midst, wouldn't it be better to accept my suggestion?

JULIA. What is that?

LADY P. Give me a full explanation of these little matters we were speaking of, and let me clear you from any further scandal. You would prefer my brother should be absent?

JULIA. No, please don't go, Mr. Stillingfleet.

LADY P. But, my dear, you would surely prefer to treat this as a matter of confidence between you and me.

Enter TEDDY, *at back, accompanied by* MRS. BENBOW, *a middle-aged woman, about fifty, a little aggressively dressed, and* ROSIE BENBOW, *her daughter, a very handsome common girl about twenty-five.*

TEDDY. Excuse our coming this way, Mrs. Wren——

(*Stops on seeing* LADY PINKNEY.)

LADY P. Teddy! Who are these ladies? They're not friends of yours?

TEDDY. Well—yes—a—it's all right. (*To* MRS. BENBOW.) It's my mother!

MRS. B. (*offering to shake hands*). Very pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am—my lady. Let me introduce you to Teddy's intended, (*Introducing*) my daughter, Rosie—Lady Pinkney—Lady Pinkney—Miss Rosa Benbow.

ROSIE. How d'ye do, my lady?

LADY P. Teddy! This is not true?

TEDDY. No. At least—I dare say it is rather a surprise, but—you know——

LADY P. (*To* STILLINGFLEET.) Did you know anything of this?

STILL. Not a word till this moment. Nor, I am sure, did Mrs. Wren.

LADY P. But it's not true! It can't be true! (*To* TEDDY.) Why don't you answer?

TEDDY. Well, I—a—you know—I rather think you'll like Rosie when you come to know her.

LADY P. (*gathering herself up, to* STILLINGFLEET.) You'd better take me home, I think.

MRS. B. Oh, my lady, there's no occasion to get into a fluster. Though I am her mother, I will say a better brought-up girl than my Rosie isn't to be found in any class. She's fit to mix in any society. There she stands, and you can judge for yourself!

ROSIE. Oh, please don't apologize for me, mother.

MRS. B. Hold your tongue, Rosie. And I'm sure, my lady, if you'll only look on it in the right

light, you'll see that when two young folks are really fond of each other there's nothing for their parents to do but to stand aside and bless their union. (*Approaching* LADY PINKNEY, *who indignantly draws herself away.*) And as for your superior rank and station, my lady—well—(*Beaming on* STILLINGFLEET)—we're all equal in the eyes of Heaven, aren't we?

STILL. I hope not, my dear lady. I sincerely hope not. (*Turning to* TEDDY.) Teddy, how far has this gone?

TEDDY. Well, I—a——

STILL. Are you engaged to this young lady?

TEDDY. Well, I—I suppose I am; and as an honourable man—I shall have to see it through, eh?

STILL. Have you written her any letters?

MRS. B. Oh, lots of 'em. And so sweetly picturesque. It's quite a romance in real life!

STILL. May I ask you where you live—Mrs. —? What is your name?

MRS. B. Benbow. I'll give you one of my cards. (*Taking out an old wooden card-case, and from it two or three greasy cards, one of which she presents to* STILLINGFLEET.) Rosie, this is your future Uncle William—if not presuming, sir, I understand you are our future Uncle William.

STILL. (*bowing slightly to* ROSIE). Future—

yes—future—Now I think, Mrs. Benbow, you and I had better discuss this together.

MRS. B. Very pleased, I'm sure, but there ain't much to discuss, because the happy day is already fixed, and the banns are to be asked for the first time next Sunday.

LADY P. (*Very much upset.*) What?! I shall put this into my lawyer's hands. My poor boy has been entrapped!

MRS. B. Entrapped? What did you say, my lady? Look at that dear girl there——

ROSIE. Oh, please don't be personal, mother. Do stand a little on your dignity, and don't lower yourself by arguing.

MRS. B. Hold your tongue, Rosie. Entrapped is a very flagrant word for one lady to use to another. And I must ask you to withdraw it, my lady.

LADY P. (*Sweeps by her; to* STILLINGFLEET.) Will you please see me back to the Hall?

(*Going off at back.*)

STILL. No, stay—we can't leave this as it stands——

JULIA. (*Who has been quietly watching all the while.*) Lady Pinkney, one moment. Mrs. Benbow, I have a suggestion to make to Lady Pinkney, which may be to your daughter's interest.

MRS. B. Very pleased, I'm sure.

JULIA. Will you and Miss Benbow kindly go into the drawing-room for a minute, and I'll come to you there. (*Opening door.*)

MRS. B. Well, ma'am——

JULIA. I shall be able to advise you, I think. (*Calls off.*) Meade, please show these ladies into the drawing-room.

MRS. B. You'll come with us too, Teddy?

TEDDY. Well, I——eh?

(*Hesitating, looks helplessly all round.*)

ROSIE. You won't desert me, Teddy, after all your promises and letters?

TEDDY. Oh, I'm going to see it through——

ROSIE. Come with us, then.

(*Exeunt* ROSIE *and* MRS. BENBOW.)

TEDDY. (*To* JULIA, *with a sickly smile.*) I suppose I'd better go with them, eh?

JULIA. Yes, I think.

(*Exit* TEDDY. *She closes the door after him.*)

LADY P. What is to be done? What can be done? What will Pinkney say?

JULIA. Dear Lady Pinkney, will you think me intrusive if I make a suggestion?

LADY P. No—no—when did you first know of this?

JULIA. Only a moment before you came. He called and asked my permission to introduce them, and of course I insisted that you and Mr. Stilling-

fleet should know. You believe me, I am sure, and you will let me help you out of this difficulty if I can.

LADY P. How?

JULIA. If I were you I should not oppose this marriage——

LADY P. Not oppose it?!

JULIA. Not for the moment. The banns are to be asked. Your first step must be to gain time. Tell them that the marriage cannot take place till Lord Pinkney returns from Australia, and that you think they ought not to see each other meantime. But that if the attachment lasts for six months you will try to meet their wishes.

LADY P. Meet their wishes?!

JULIA. You will try—in six months. And if you will allow me to help you still further——

LADY P. My dear Mrs. Wren——

JULIA. I will suggest they should take a trip to the seaside or to the Continent, and I will spare them my servant Meade. I can trust Meade thoroughly, and I'm sure she will look after—their comforts. A great deal may happen in six months.

STILL. (*Who has been listening and showing approval.*) Excellent! My dear Mrs. Wren! I congratulate you! It's a great scheme! I'm sure my sister is very grateful to you!

JULIA. Shall I suggest it to them?

LADY P. Well, there could be no harm——

STILL. Harm! My dear Madge. It's a tremendous scheme.

JULIA. If you will leave them with me I'll try and get them to accept it.

LADY P. Thank you very much. Then will you please tell my son that I'm waiting for him?

JULIA. I think you'd better let him stay for a time. I have to soften the process of saying adieu to the young lady, and get them to part for six months. Then I have to work upon Mrs. Benbow. I'm afraid she'll need some managing——

LADY P. Dear Mrs. Wren, I'll leave the matter entirely in your hands. I'm infinitely obliged to you. Good-bye. You'll let me know how you succeed? I'll go this way if you don't mind, as I've no wish to meet——(*Comes back.*) Now, Bill. (*Exit.*)

(STILLINGFLEET *goes up to window and then he deliberately drops his gloves in sight of* JULIA. *Exit* STILLINGFLEET. *She goes and picks them up.*)

STILL. (*Off.*) One moment, Madge! I've left my gloves! I'll join you directly. (*He reenters, takes her hand and says.*) In six months, a great deal may happen——

(*He goes up. She goes to door. They kiss hands, and*

CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE—Drawing-room at Lady Pinckney's, Shanctonbury Hall. A large, dignified, squarely-built room in an English mansion. At back are three large, long windows, curtained in red damask or velvet. Down stage, left, a large fireplace with fire burning. Right, a large, handsome cabinet, surrounded by old pictures, chiefly family portraits. A door up stage, right, above the cabinet. A door down stage, right, below the cabinet. A door up stage, left, above the fireplace. A cozy sofa above the fireplace, facing direct towards audience. A table, right, in front of cabinet.

TIME—Midwinter, about half-past six in the evening. The room lighted. The curtains at back drawn.

Discover BEVIS, *rather impatiently walking up and down. Enter* GRIGGS, *the butler, left, showing in* SAMWAYS. SAMWAYS *has some papers in his hands.*

GRIGGS. I'll tell her ladyship you're here, sir.

(*Exit* GRIGGS.)

SAMWAYS. (*Comes down, looking over papers.*) How d'ye do?

BEVIS. (*Rather curtly.*) How d'ye do?

(*Shaking hands.*) This is an extraordinary story about my brother.

SAMWAYS. (*Chuckles.*) Yes—curious, isn't it? (*Chuckling.*)

BEVIS. I see no reason for laughter. (SAMWAYS *pulls himself up.*) How is it that I've been kept in ignorance all through? Why has everything been done behind my back?

SAMWAYS. Well, Lady Pinkney thought, and Mr. Stillingfleet thought, that having regard to your peculiar susceptibilities and your connection with the Bishop's family, they wouldn't make you uncomfortable by telling you anything about it till it was all over.

BEVIS. Then it is all over?

SAMWAYS. Yes—thanks to Mrs. Wren.

BEVIS. Mrs. Wren?

SAMWAYS. I've got all your brotner's letters here, and the young lady's acknowledgment of the five hundred pounds I've paid her in discharge of your brother's promise.

BEVIS. Five hundred pounds!

SAMWAYS. Yes—it was five thousand last time; so it would have been this, if Mrs. Wren hadn't managed it.

BEVIS. Oh, we are indebted to Mrs. Wren—for what?

SAMWAYS. Well, she arranged to get the mother and the girl away to the Continent, in

charge of her confidential servant, Meade—clever woman that. After a month or so Meade's suspicions are aroused with regard to the young lady's conduct, and she very properly writes to Mrs. Wren, who very properly informs me, and I very properly have the young lady watched, with results that prove that she—the young lady—is not behaving very properly. I hasten over to Paris, have an interview with the young lady and mamma. Mamma is shrewd enough to see that if she can keep the letters in her possession there is a chance of blackmailing us. So I detach the young lady and drive a bargain with her behind mamma's back. She steals the letters from mamma's box, gives them to me, signs this document, I hand her the money in golden sovereigns, treat myself to an exceedingly good dinner, and take the night train back. There! Now you know all about it.

Enter LADY PINKNEY, *left.*

LADY P. Ah, Mr. Samways——

SAMWAYS (*shaking hands*). How d'ye do?

LADY P. Oh, Bevis, Sophie has just sent your man across to say that your cook has been drinking again, and seems likely to make a hash, not only of the dinner, but of the kitchen furniture. She thinks you'd better step home at once

BEVIS. I wish to know, first, about this disgraceful affair of Teddy's——

LADY P. There is no disgraceful affair; its quite concluded.

BEVIS. But it's important for Sophie and me to know how far Mrs. Wren has moved in the matter.

LADY P. It's far more important for you to know how far your cook is spoiling your dinner. Sophie wishes you to go at once.

BEVIS. I'll come over again. Samways, you and I will have a further talk over this.

SAMWAYS. By all means Mr. Bevis.

(*Exit* BEVIS, *left.* SAMWAYS *turns inquiringly to* LADY PINKNEY.)

LADY P. Now—have you got Teddy's letters?

SAMWAYS. There they are. (LADY PINKNEY *takes them.*) I don't think I'd look at them—they're of the sort that are only amusing when they're read out in Court. And here's the girl's undertaking not to molest—I've drawn it up very strictly. Shall I keep it?

LADY P. Yes, you'd better. And this wretched business is now at an end?

SAMWAYS. Quite. Except——

LADY P. What?

SAMWAYS. Mrs. Benbow may give you a little trouble.

LADY P. How?

SAMWAYS. The girl had to break open her mother's box to get her letters. When the mother discovered the letters were in my possession, she came to my hotel and raised a bit of a storm. She may possibly bluster and threaten you. Don't be alarmed! She can do nothing. If she does turn up, hand her over to me, and I'll soon damp her down.

LADY P. I'll keep these letters. Thank you very much, Samways.

SAMWAYS. Oh, don't thank me. It's Mrs. Wren you should thank.

LADY P. Yes—I know. Now I wish to consult you in the strictest professional confidence—

SAMWAYS. Certainly.

LADY P. What is the status of people who have contracted a morganatic marriage?

SAMWAYS. (SAMWAYS' *face drops.*) Morganatic marriage?

LADY P. Yes——

SAMWAYS. Well — broadly speaking — their status is the same as that of people who have contracted an ordinary marriage.

LADY P. But there are exceptions?

SAMWAYS. Oh yes.

LADY P. Such as—for instance——?

SAMWAYS. Such as—for instance——?

LADY P. A foreign Royal Duke would be

allowed very considerable latitude in making his marriage arrangements?

SAMWAYS. Yes—yes—certainly——

LADY P. Suppose the foreign Royal Duke found himself already married——

SAMWAYS. Yes——

LADY P. To a terribly unsuitable person——

SAMWAYS. Yes——

LADY P. And wished to contract a morganatic marriage—a strictly honourable morganatic marriage with another lady—What would his position be?

SAMWAYS. Well, broadly speaking, his position would be that of a great many worthy married men of all ranks, who find themselves married to terribly unsuitable persons, and who wish to contract strictly honourable marriages with other ladies.

LADY P. The law wouldn't permit him to do it?

SAMWAYS. There might be some difficulty.

LADY P. In that case, what would he do?

SAMWAYS. Well—that depends.

LADY P. If he were to contract say—not a formal morganatic marriage, but something equivalent to a morganatic marriage?

SAMWAYS. Yes?

LADY P. How far would it be recognized as legal?

SAMWAYS. Where?

LADY P. Here? Or on the Continent?

SAMWAYS. Well—a—there would always be some suspicion attaching to it in Western Europe.

LADY P. But—in Eastern——

SAMWAYS. Well, broadly speaking, we may say that the further East we go, the more recognition would be accorded to it. But the law is in such a chaos, I wouldn't venture off-hand to give an opinion.

STILLINGFLEET *enters, right, in evening dress.*

LADY P. Really the whole affair is most embarrassing!

STILL. What is embarrassing? How do, Samways?

SAMWAYS. How are you?

(*Shaking hands.*)

LADY P. You're dressed, Bill—what's the time? I shall be late for dinner.

STILL. Don't distress yourself. It isn't seven yet. I came home after a long day with the hounds, and was glad to get into my evening clothes. But what's worrying you?

LADY P. Mrs. Wren. I must make her some recognition, don't you think?

STILL. Recognition?! Certainly you must.

LADY P. I've asked her to look in this evening and stay dinner.

STILL. You've asked her to dinner?!

LADY P. Not formally. If Bevis and the Blenkinsops knew that I'd invited Mrs. Wren to dinner, I should never hear the last of it. But now, if they get to know of it, I can say, and you will say, that I had to see her on this business of Teddy's; and that as dinner was approaching, I asked her as a mere civility to stay.

STILL. Then you haven't invited anybody to meet her?

LADY P. My dear Bill! There will be yourself, and myself, and Teddy, and (*Sees* SAMWAYS.) Mr. Samways, you're not engaged for dinner?

SAMWAYS. No——

LADY P. Then you'll join us?

SAMWAYS. Delighted. (*Takes out watch.*) I'll just hurry back and dress.

LADY P. Yes—You're passing the Mount?

SAMWAYS. I could go that way.

LADY P. In writing to Mrs. Wren and suggesting she should dine with us to-night, in a quite informal way, I said it would be an immense relief to all of us if she would clear up these—insinuations, eh?

SAMWAYS. (*Cordially.*) By all means.

LADY P. I've suggested that if she doesn't care to speak, she might give me in confidence some little statement in writing—eh?

SAMWAYS. Yes, in writing.

LADY P. I should then be able to assure everybody that she had absolutely dispelled these—slanders.

SAMWAYS. Yes—that course commends itself to me.

LADY P. Then you will urge her to adopt that course?

SAMWAYS. Yes—I will——

LADY P. I don't think you have managed this business very cleverly——

SAMWAYS. Lady Pinkney!

LADY P. You are a lawyer! Surely by this time you ought either to have given us satisfactory account of the puff-box, or to have established the morganatic marriage!

SAMWAYS. My dear Lady Pinkney—

LADY P. You've muddled it, Samways, you've muddled it very badly! Till dinner then?

SAMWAYS. Till dinner!

Enter GRIGGS, *left, showing in* JULIA *with a cloak over a dinner dress, and* TRIXIE BLENKINSOP *in winter afternoon dress.*

GRIGGS. (*Announcing.*) Mrs. Wren! Miss Blenkinsop!

Enter JULIA *and* TRIXIE. *Exit* GRIGGS.

LADY P. How d'ye do?

JULIA (*shaking hands*). How d'ye do? (*Turns to* STILLINGFLEET.) How d'ye do?

STILL. How d'ye do?

JULIA. Cousin Tom, how are you?

SAMWAYS (*shaking hands*). Very well, my dear. Going to meet you here at dinner. Good-bye till then. (*Hurries off left.*)

JULIA. It's barely seven, but you said, "Look in a little before dinner and stay." I hope I haven't interpreted my invitation too liberally?

LADY P. Not at all.

(LADY PINKNEY *and* TRIXIE *have severely taken no notice of each other.*)

JULIA. It's this naughty girl who is the cause of my coming so early. I found her wandering round my garden in the cold, so I brought her on here to apologize for her conduct to you in my house some months ago.

LADY P. (*Very severely.*) I wish never to have anything more to do with Trixie. I'm surprised at her coming here.

TRIXIE. (*To* JULIA.) There! What did I tell you?

JULIA. Hush! But Lady Pinkney, she is very sorry and has come to ask your forgiveness. Trixie——

TRIXIE. (*In a quick hard perfunctory impenitent tone.*) I beg your pardon.

JULIA. No, Trixie! Not in that tone!

TRIXIE. (*A shade softer and more penitent.*) I beg your pardon, Lady Pinkney. (LADY PINKNEY *remains cold and severe.*) (TRIXIE, *after a pause and a little supplicating gesture from* JULIA, *shouts out as if* LADY PINKNEY *were deaf.*) I beg your pardon, Lady Pinkney!

JULIA. Trixie! Trixie!

TRIXIE. Well, what can I do? (*Tries another tone, says it very quickly, repeats it hurriedly about ten times.*) I beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon, beg your pardon! There!

JULIA. I'm sorry, Lady Pinkney. It is I who have to beg your pardon for having brought a rude, naughty girl into your house. Will you please forgive me? (*Turns to* TRIXIE.) Trixie, you might have spared me this.

TRIXIE. (*Turns to* LADY PINKNEY, *and in a really penitent voice says*) I'm very sorry, Lady Pinkney! I beg your pardon! I really mean it this time! Will you please forgive me?

LADY P. (*Quietly kissing* TRIXIE.) I forgive you, Trixie!

Enter TEDDY, *upper door, right.*

TEDDY. (*Surprised at seeing* JULIA.) Mrs.

Wren! By Jove! How are you? (*Shaking hands.*)

JULIA. How d'ye do?

TEDDY. Delighted to see you here!

LADY P. Mrs. Wren has come on a little matter of business and——

(*Glancing at* TRIXIE.)

JULIA. Perhaps Mr. Pinkney would see Miss Blenkinsop across to the Palace.

TEDDY. Oh yes—delighted——

TRIXIE. Thank you very much, Mr. Pinkney, but I'm quite capable of taking care of myself—Good-bye everybody.

LADY P. Trixie, I can't allow you to go alone in the dark.

JULIA. Dear Lady Pinkney, as I am unavoidably responsible for Miss Blenkinsop's being here, I'll see her to your lodge gates, and Mr. Pinkney shall take care of her from the lodge gates to the Palace, eh?

TEDDY. Delighted.

JULIA. Come along then.

TRIXIE. Oh, very well. But you know I'm taken too much care of. Mine is a nature that demands perfect trust from those older than myself. All my wickedness comes from not being trusted, and allowed to follow my own healthy natural instincts. (*With a sudden rush of affection.*) Good-bye, dear Lady Pinkney. (*Goes to*

LADY PINKNEY *and kisses her.*) Now, Teddy.
(*Going off left.*)

TEDDY. Delighted—I'm sure——
(*Exeunt* TEDDY *and* TRIXIE.)

JULIA. I'll see them to the lodge gates.

LADY P. Your nearest way will be through the small hall and conservatory——

JULIA. Oh, I know quite well. You forget I used to be a frequent visitor here. (*Exit left.*)

LADY P. She seems to have an extraordinary influence over Trixie.

STILL. And Trixie seems very much attached to her.

LADY P. When I was at the Mount yesterday she suggested she should take Trixie away with her to the seaside for Easter, and that Teddy should be allowed to come there as if by accident under your guardianship—or mine——

STILL. A very excellent plan! I should let her carry it out.

LADY P. My dear Bill, the Blenkinsops would never permit it. Besides, I'm under sufficient obligations to her already in this matter of Teddy's. No, I must make her some very handsome acknowledgment and then—it would be a great relief to everybody if she would leave Shanctonbury, eh?

STILL. I don't think so. After what she has

done for you I should have thought you would wish her to stay near you——

LADY P. Personally, I should be delighted. But it's useless for her to think of living in Shanctonbury unless she clears up the puff-box. I've given her another chance to-night. We shall see whether she avails herself of it. Meantime, what acknowledgment do you think—

STILL. It's difficult to say. You are really under an enormous debt to her——

LADY P. Yes, we certainly owe her a large debt of gratitude. What recognition do you think?

STILL. A present would be a grave mistake.

LADY P. Why?

STILL. It would look as if you thought that such services as hers could be bought and paid for. No!

LADY P. Well—what?

STILL. It's a dilemma, but I think I can help you out of it.

LADY P. How?

STILL. I don't think you know how much attached you are to Mrs. Wren. And for myself I can truly say that the more I see of her the more admirable and charming in every way does she seem to me.

LADY P. (*getting suspicious*). Bill!

STILL. In fact I've been thinking over the

good advice you've been giving me for years past about settling down——

LADY P. Bill!

STILL. That's the best of me, I do take good advice. Not at the time, perhaps. Good advice shouldn't be taken too recklessly, should it? No —I daresay you've noticed that it seems to roll off me like water off a duck's back, but all the while, Madge, it's making a deep impression on me—or rather *in* me—I'm taking it internally. I'm saying to myself, "That dear good sister of mine! (*Fondling her.*) She's right after all. These racketty ways won't do! I must pull up and become a credit to myself and the family. Now where can I find a woman——"

LADY P. (*Much alarmed.*) Bill!

STILL. Where can I find a woman who will have the courage and the kindness and the patience to take me as I am; not a raw, gawky school-girl, but a woman with some little knowledge of the world—a woman of tact and gentleness, and sweetness, and refinement, a woman who sums up all the essential feminine graces in her own dear charming person——

LADY P. Bill, you're going to marry Mrs. Wren!

STILL. I'm a lucky beggar, ain't I? You see you recognized her description in a moment! Now congratulate me!

LADY P. Bill, this is too bad of you! And these last few months you've led me to think your friendship with her was practically broken off.

STILL. That was my tact and thoughtfulness for you! I saw you were worried about Teddy, so I thought I would wait and give you a pleasant surprise.

LADY P. Surprise! (*Much upset.*) If you marry Mrs. Wren, it will make Shanctonbury quite impossible for me!

Enter JULIA, *left, still in her cloak, but with evening slippers.*

JULIA. They've raced off to the Palace on the best of terms with each other. I'm sure they could easily be led into a real attachment. (*Coming to* LADY PINKNEY.) Is anything the matter?

LADY P. No. My brother has just told me—that——

STILL. She's naturally a little surprised to hear of our engagement—such a dear tender sympathetic creature she is——

(*Fondling* LADY PINKNEY.)

JULIA. I'm afraid the news has not been agreeable to you?

LADY P. Oh yes—at least—oh yes——

JULIA. Would you rather I didn't stay tonight?

LADY P. Yes, my dear, you'd better stay now.

And of course—I—I—congratulate you both, but — Now, my dear Mrs. Wren, my dear Julia, if you are to marry my brother, you must see how necessary it is to give me some explanation of—a—the—a—puff-box—eh?

JULIA. Dear Lady Pinkney, have I not always said that an explanation would be forthcoming at the right moment?

LADY P. Well, dear, if this isn't the right moment, when will it be?

JULIA. I have come prepared to give an explanation.

LADY P. (*Surprised, delighted.*) You have? (*Drawing out watch.*) I've just a few minutes before I go to dress for dinner. (*Seats herself very determinedly.*) Now, dear!

STILL. You wish me to go?

JULIA. No. Isn't my explanation due to you rather than to Lady Pinkney?

STILL. I've never asked for any explanation—

JULIA. No—but if I owe an explanation to anyone, surely it is first to you? Don't you think so, Lady Pinkney?

LADY P. By all means, dear. Then you would prefer to explain to Bill first?

JULIA. If you don't mind.

LADY P. (*rising*). Very well. I'll leave you with him. But, dear, after dinner some little explanation must be forthcoming to me—just

enough to satisfy the good Shanctonbury people, eh?

(*Exit* LADY PINKNEY *upper door, right.*)

JULIA. How did she take the announcement?

STILL. She was a little upset at first, but she's coming round, and—don't you think it would be better for us to—a—satisfy the good Shanctonbury people?

JULIA. I wonder what would satisfy the good Shanctonbury people. What would satisfy you?

STILL. Have I ever seemed curious?

JULIA. No. Then you are satisfied?

STILL. Quite. Quite. At least if you are going to satisfy our good Shanctonbury neighbours—it would be rather unkind to leave me out in the cold, wouldn't it?

JULIA. I won't leave you out in the cold——

(*A pause.*)

STILL. What are you going to do?

JULIA. I don't know. (*Smiling at him.*) I haven't made up my mnid. At least, I'm going to stay to dinner, so I may as well take off this cloak. (*He helps her to take off cloak.*) One moment. We shall want this.

(*Taking a large blue envelope out of her cloak pocket.*)

STILL. What's that?

JULIA. That's a stout, trustworthy envelope

which contains some important documents. (*Putting it on the table.*) We'll lay it there.

(*They both sit down, one on each side of the table with the envelope between them—a pause. They look at each other and laugh.*)

STILL. Well?

JULIA. Well?

STILL. Well?

JULIA. What ought I to do?

STILL. I think you ought to—just—say—a—

JULIA. Say—what?

STILL. Well, just enough to make peoples' minds easy about you.

JULIA. Suppose that were difficult?

STILL. Difficult?!

JULIA. Suppose—I only say suppose—it were impossible?

STILL. Then I would leave the matter entirely in your hands.

JULIA. You would be satisfied to do that? For now and always?

STILL. Yes, so far as my own happiness is concerned. Believe me, dear, I suspect nothing; I regret nothing; I guess nothing; I know nothing. I don't even wish to know if there is anything to know.

JULIA. Will, I love you a dozen times as much as I did when we became engaged!

STILL. Why, dear?

JULIA. Because you've never said one word, you've never thrown out the least hint that didn't show the most complete confidence in me. There's nothing wins a woman's heart like that. We love to be trusted, and sometimes we need it—oh, so much!

STILL. Do you need it—now?

JULIA. Very much—or not at all.—You shall decide.

STILL. What do you mean?

JULIA. When Lady Pinkney's note came inviting me to look in half an hour before dinner, she suggested that if I didn't wish to speak of any awkward matters, I might prefer to write them down.

STILL. And you did?

JULIA. To be downright honest, I would have got out of it if I could. But as you were going to announce our engagement, I didn't see that I could very well refuse. So I looked out two or three old letters, put them together and wrote out a plain unvarnished statement of the whole affair.

STILL. (*looking towards envelope*). There? (JULIA *nods.*) For her?

JULIA. No—for you. (*He half voluntarily stretches his hand towards it, then withdraws.*) Yes. Take it. And—you are to consider that we are not engaged. You are quite free. Read

over carefully what is there, and then—never see me again, or—ask me once more to be your wife

———

STILL. (*looking at envelope.*) That contains all the story——

JULIA. Yes—everything.

STILL. What would be the effect on the Shanctonbury people?

JULIA. Read it—and judge.

(STILLINGFLEET *again half stretches his hand towards it—and again withdraws.*)

JULIA. It won't bite you—at least I don't think it will. (*Pause.*) Why don't you read it?

STILL. Do you wish me?

JULIA. I don't know. If you will ever have doubts and suspicions of me, yes—tear it open this moment.

STILL. But say that I'm perfectly satisfied not to know, that whatever that envelope contains I shall never be curious and suspicious—that you may be quite sure of my trust and love in the future, then?

JULIA. (*After a moment's pause.*) Then I would rather you did not read it. But are you sure you won't be curious, suspicious, jealous?

STILL. If I haven't shown myself so already, why should I in the future?

JULIA. Why should you? Why should men

and women ever be jealous? I have never asked you a single question, and yet I've heard whispers, sir, and more than whispers. I've heard enough to send me frantic with suspicion and distrust of you—and alarm for our future. I've a great mind to cross-question you? Shall I? Shall I begin to torture you and myself? Where would that end? If love is jealous at all, it should be jealous of the least thought, the least imagining; every childish whim and fancy should be brought into the account; we should spend half our lives holding inquests on the dreams and ghosts of our dead caprices. How many rivals have I had? How many have I now—at this moment? I'm sure there are a hundred of the hussies, aren't there? Tell me truly! No, don't. Life won't bear looking at, will it? I've never really had a rival, have I? I'm sure I haven't—she was only a passing vision—they were all passing visions, mere phantoms, the whole army of them, weren't they? And they've vanished, and I'm the flesh and blood actual breathing woman—at any rate I'm alive and I'm here—and I don't want to know any more, do you? If you do—I'll tell you.

STILL. What?

JULIA. The whole truth. You've had quite a million rivals, most of them quite harmless and shapeless—just little fugitive imps, and they've all flown away—except this one here. (*Point-*

ing to the envelope.) Why don't you open it? (*He hesitates.*) You'd better!

STILL. If I open this——

JULIA. Yes?

STILL. Forgive my asking—these letters?—they spoke an attachment that had something sacred in it?

JULIA. Very sacred at the time.

STILL. And now?

JULIA. Quite dead.

STILL. But it was sacred. (*He gives her back the envelope.*) I couldn't open it for worlds.

JULIA. I wish you to open it rather than you should ever suspect——

STILL. What?

JULIA. Anything that would degrade me in your eyes. Yes—open it.

STILL. (*Hesitates, then very firmly.*) No.

JULIA. Shall I give it to Lady Pinkney?

STILL. No—that would be worse.

JULIA. What shall I do with it?

STILL. You wish to keep these letters?

JULIA. No—I meant to destroy them to-night after you had read them.

STILL. Then I may?

(*She nods—he puts the envelope on the fire; they watch it burn.*)

STILL. Cremation is best with dead loves too.

JULIA. (*When the envelope is burnt.*) Thank you, dear. (*He kisses her simply.*)

STILL. We will let the good Shanctonbury people say and think what they please. We will say nothing. We understand each other.

(*She gratefully presses his hand, then kisses it.*)

Enter BEVIS *left—he stops surprised on seeing* JULIA, *bows very slightly to* JULIA, *who bows in return.*

BEVIS. I—a——

STILL. What's the matter?

BEVIS. Our cook has been drinking again, and we've had to send her away; so we've come over to dinner, but I wasn't aware——

(*Glancing at* JULIA—MRS. BEVIS *enters left in dinner dress; she also stops surprised at seeing* JULIA.)

BEVIS. My dear Sophie, I think you'd better—

STILL. My dear Sophie, pray come in. (*Movement of remonstrance from* BEVIS.) Yes, my dear Bevis, if you please! (*Authoritatively.*) If you please! I have an interesting announcement to make to you. Mrs. Wren is going to do me the honour to become my wife——(*Movement of alarm on the part of* BEVIS *and* JULIA.) and she is also going to stay to dinner here this evening. (*An awkward pause.*)

BEVIS. Indeed—I——

MRS. B. I congratulate you—I think I'll step upstairs to Lady Pinkney. Bevis, we won't stay dinner.

(BEVIS *opens upper door right for her. She sweeps off.*)

JULIA. Perhaps it will be better for *me* not to stay.

(*Makes a movement to take up her cloak.*)

STILL. (*arresting her movement.*) My dear Julia, if anyone has to give way, I'm sure Bevis will own that his mother's invited guest must take precedence.

BEVIS. (*To* JULIA.) Will you allow me a few moments with Mr. Stillingfleet?

JULIA. I'm sure I'd better go—yes, please.

STILL. No. There's a fire in the morning room. (*Opening lower door right, looking in.*) Yes—step in there for a few moments.

(*Turning on an electric light on the other side of the door.*)

JULIA. (*To* STILLINGFLEET.) Whatever happens don't let me bring discord into your family.

STILL. Oh, you shan't!

(*Smiling her off. Exit* JULIA *lower door right.*)

STILL. Now, my boy——

BEVIS. I cannot say that I am surprised. Re-

membering certain incidents in your former career——

STILL. My dear Bevis, we cremated them.

BEVIS. I did not—as you term it—cremate them.

STILL. (*Sharply.*) Well, I did.

BEVIS. After those incidents I cannot say that any action of yours would cause me any great surprise, or any great concern.

STILL. No? I thought you showed just a little too much concern——

BEVIS. On account of our family, yes. On account of my dear mother and wife, yes. On account of the unpleasantness all round that must attend this most ill-advised step—yes. But on your account, no.

STILL. Quite thrown me over, eh? Quite washed your hands of me?

BEVIS. I think you might for once drop your habit of turning everything to a jest. Surely you must see this a serious moment——

STILL. It is, and if you and your wife object to sit at table with the lady who is to be my wife, I advise you to hurry across to the Bishop's and join their party; or order a dinner at the Dolphin; for (*taking out watch*) in a quarter of an hour, whoever else may, or may not, be dining here, I assure you Mrs. Wren and I shall.

BEVIS. I wasn't thinking of dinner——

STILL. Well, I was. I've been out with the hounds, and I'm very glad it's your cook who has been misbehaving, and not ours. Now shall we let the matter rest?

BEVIS. I cannot allow the matter to rest. I have never felt so thoroughly upset in the whole course of my life——

STILL. Upset at what?

BEVIS. At the most uncomfortable, the most painful prospect of Mrs. Wren being introduced into our family. Now, my dear uncle, I do beg you to realize what you are doing—It's not yet too late——

STILL. My dear Bevis, it is too late, even for sermonizing about it.

BEVIS. But reflect—What will be the result of this most undesirable alliance? What does my mother say? How am I to regard it? Do you intend to reside amongst us—You will find it impossible. What do you suppose will be the effect in Shanctonbury?

STILL. I hope I shall never willingly shock or offend my neighbours, and you may be sure that my wife and I shall do all we can to gain their friendship and esteem. But I will allow neither you, nor your mother, nor anyone else, to dictate to me whom I shall marry, or where I shall live when I am married. And when I have chosen a woman whom I love and have given her my name,

I hope you and your Shanctonbury friends will condescend at times to recognize us, and occasionally leave a card upon us, or perhaps even to dine with us. But if you don't; if you consider you will be happier; or more respectable; or more righteous; or more self-righteous; or more puffed up not to know us, then, in Heaven's name, cut us, my dear boy! Cut us! Don't know us! God forbid that for the pleasure and honour of your acquaintance, I should selfishly rob you and your neighbours of your good opinion of yourselves—Don't think so badly of me. Don't think I'd strip one little rag of your self-esteem from you. But, understand, Mrs. Wren is to be my wife; that's a fact—and you and Shanctonbury have got to swallow it; whether or no you swallow us along with it. And now, as I've already listened to what, coming from you, I am willing to call good advice, but coming from anybody else I should call damned impudence—we will please drop this matter once and for all.

BEVIS. (*Incensed.*) Very well. I don't know what mother's feelings or intentions may be, but speaking for myself and my wife, and my wife's family, I must tell you frankly we shall not countenance this marriage; we shall not recognize you or your wife in any way; we shall let all our neighbours see plainly how we regard you, and if

you continue to reside in Shanctonbury, we shall do our utmost to mark our——

MRS. BENBOW *has crept on, door left.* STILLINGFLEET *snatches* BEVIS'S *arm and arrests him.*

MRS. B. I beg your pardon for intruding—(*At the sound of her voice,* BEVIS *just glances round, unperceived by* MRS. BENBOW. *He shows great fright and stands paralysed with terror, to the surprise of* STILLINGFLEET, *who is looking at him.*)

MRS. B. (*coming up to* STILLINGFLEET, *who looks from one to the other.*) Oh, it's Mr. Stillingfleet—How d'ye do?

(*Offering to shake hands.*)

STILL. (*taking no notice of her, watching* BEVIS.) How d'ye do?

(BEVIS *hides his face from* MRS. BENBOW, *goes to sofa, and sits there with face averted from her, shivering with fright.*)

MRS. B. I've sent up my card to Lady Pinkney with a message, but instead of being treated with respect, nobody takes any notice of me. I've been kept waiting in the hall for over a quarter of an hour——

STILL. (*looking from her to* BEVIS). What is your business with Lady Pinkney? Perhaps I

might do instead, or (*looking at* BEVIS, *whose back is turned*) this is Lady Pinkney's son——

MRS. B. Teddy! Well, my business is with him as well—(*Approaching* BEVIS.) No; it isn't Teddy.

(BEVIS *has been sitting in an agony of fright, his face averted; as she approaches him, he loses all self-control, and in sheer panic faces the woman.*)

BEVIS. What do you want with me? I've paid you, haven't I?

MRS. B. (*Surprised.*) Mr. Cheriton!

STILL. Cheriton!

BEVIS. I will have nothing to do with you—I —a—(*Apologetically to* STILLINGFLEET, *trying to smile.*) She must be some impostor!

Enter GRIGGS, *showing in* SAMWAYS.

GRIGGS. (*Announces.*) Mr. Samways—Oh (*Seeing* MRS. BENBOW.) I beg pardon, sir. I told that person to wait in the hall——

STILL. Never mind, Griggs, I'll see to her.

(*Exit* GRIGGS.)

SAMWAYS. (*Has come up to* MRS. BENBOW.) Hillo! What's the meaning of this?

BEVIS. (*To* SAMWAYS.) One moment, Samways.

(*Draws* SAMWAYS *aside and is seen to*

talk to him very eagerly with reference in gesture to MRS. BENBOW.)

STILL. (*To* MRS. BENBOW.) What's your business with Lady Pinkney?

MRS. B. (*glancing round nervously at* SAMWAYS). Well, I've come about the letters that have been stolen from me by her connivance. Of course I don't wish in any way to make myself obnoxious, or cantankerous—unless I'm forced so to do—but if I was forced to make myself obnoxious or cantankerous, well—it would be painful for me, and painful for you, and painful for Lady Pinkney, so I hope it won't be necessary for me to take that step.

SAMWAYS (*having listened to* BEVIS). All right. Leave it to me. (*To* STILLINGFLEET.) Is the library free?

STILL. Yes, I think.

SAMWAYS. (*Very sharply to* MRS. BENBOW.) Come this way!

MRS. B. Eh?

SAMWAYS. Come this way! Now! Quick! Unless I am to take means——

MRS. B. Oh, there's no necessity to use violence to a lady. (*As she is going off, left, she turns and looks at* BEVIS, *who is still shivering with fright.*) Mr. Cheriton!

(SAMWAYS *peremptorily points her off. Exit* MRS. BENBOW, *left, followed by*

SAMWAYS. BEVIS *follows them up fearfully, looking after them.*)

STILL. Old acquaintance of yours?

BEVIS. No—at least—(*Trying to put a good face on it.*) Perhaps you think that this affair requires an explanation——

STILL. Not a bit, my dear lad. If you're in a mess, take my advice; don't explain to anybody how you got there, but quietly pick yourself out of it, wipe your boots, and say no more about it. Now, can I lend you a helping hand?

BEVIS. In what way? I'm not in any mess.

STILL. I'm glad to hear it.

BEVIS. Whenever my past actions and motives are examined, I shall have nothing to be ashamed of.

STILL. I'm sure you won't. I'm sure we shall learn a great deal that will redound to your credit.

BEVIS. I don't say that——

STILL. Ah, that's your modesty. Now I'm quite sure you've befriended that poor dear old lady in some way, and you stand here shaking with fright lest your good actions should become known, and blazed abroad in Shanctonbury, so that the Blenkinsops and all your other friends should get to know of them. (*Shaking* BEVIS *good-humouredly.*) Isn't that it, eh?

BEVIS. (*Ghastly with fright.*) Uncle—I'll tell you all.

STILL. My dear Bevis, I don't wish to know.

BEVIS. Yes, I'd better tell you—in case any garbled account of this should become public. My only wish is to spare my dear mother and wife the pain of hearing anything that would destroy their ideal of me.

STILL. That's very thoughtful of you—all for the sake of others.

BEVIS. It's not very bad after all—but you see I've tried to set a very high standard—for the sake of other people——

STILL. All for the sake of others. Well, of course, if you set up a very high standard for other people and make them conform to it, that surely gives you the right to exercise a great deal of discretion in your own private actions; for instance, say your high standard forces ten of your neighbours to be moral, and you are immoral yourself, the net result is that you have benefited public morality to the extent of nine, eh? Isn't that so?

BEVIS. (*Inclined to assent.*) Well—a—I—

STILL. Now I'm sure you've benefited morality in that way, haven't you? Confess! You're looking a little white still——

BEVIS. (*Still ghastly.*) It's nothing—I hope Samways won't be long—the woman has no possible claim on me.

STILL. No?

BEVIS. Not morally,

STILL. No—not morally.

BEVIS. When I was at Oxford, I was betrayed into a very undesirable friendship—really betrayed into it——

STILL. My boy, I sympathize with you. I've been betrayed myself—so many times. Go on.

BEVIS. But I summoned all my resolution, and I very soon conquered——

STILL. (*Claps him on the shoulder.*) Brave boy! Dear boy! I don't wonder that you want to make it hot for other people. Brave boy! Go on!

BEVIS. I conquered, and got them out of the country to Australia, by payment of a considerable sum. That's really all. I was extremely upset in the summer to find the mother and daughter at our curates' fête here in Shanctonbury. I can't imagine what they were doing here. I told Samways the outline of the story then. I hope he will come to some arrangement with her. (*Looking anxiously at door.*) Uncle, you won't misunderstand me?

STILL. How?

BEVIS. At first sight I may appear to be a hypocrite.

STILL. Oh, not at all. Oh no!

BEVIS. No, I'm really not a hypocrite. It was the realization of the wickedness of my own conduct that has led me to be so strict with others—

STILL. Yes, yes, to be sure.

BEVIS. I've been quite consistent throughout——

STILL. I'm sure you have. And I'm sure if I were to give you an explanation of your own conduct, you wouldn't understand me.

BEVIS. Not understand you?

STILL. If I were to show you your own portrait, you wouldn't recognize it!

BEVIS. How not recognize it?

STILL. You've worn this mask so long, you don't know your own features. Do you ever look at yourself? Do you ever question your own heart? (*Very tenderly.*) My lad, knowing what you do of your own life, how could you breathe one word against another? How could you lift up the smallest pebble to stone your neighbours? Ah, that's right! Look within for one moment, and resolve for the future to have done with this dry rot of making other people virtuous! Here sits the one and only rascal you've got to reform! (*Shaking* BEVIS *vigorously.*)

BEVIS. I can see now that I have been too severe.

STILL. Say no more. So far as I am concerned, it's past. But there is someone who is very dear to me, and whom I wish to preserve from pain and slander——

BEVIS. Mrs. Wren? I fear I have been very much mistaken in my estimate of Mrs. Wren.

STILL. You have been very much mistaken. You will please let that be known——?

BEVIS. Oh yes, I'll explain to my wife, and in fact to everybody——

STILL. Yes, do, do—you're good at explanations. And I've no doubt after your explanation Mrs. Wren will be received in Shanctonbury?

BEVIS. Well, we shall receive her ourselves, and if she is received by us I don't think you need have any doubt——

STILL. Then I'll leave all the explaining to you. Now we shall have quite a pleasant family dinner party——

BEVIS. Yes—if Samways——

(*Looking anxiously at door left.*)

Enter SAMWAYS, *left.*

SAMWAYS (*rubbing his hands.*) That's settled!

BEVIS. Settled?

SAMWAYS. The lady leaves Shanctonbury tomorrow and we shall have no further trouble with her. (*To* BEVIS.) Your friend Brown need have no further anxiety.

BEVIS. Thank you so much.

Enter JULIA, *lower door right.*

BEVIS. (*Advances cordially to her.*) My dear Mrs. Wren, I very much regret there has been any misunderstanding between us, and I hope we shall be good friends in the future. (*Offering hand.*)

JULIA. (*Nonplussed.*) I shall be delighted (*Shaking hands*) but—(*Looks bewildered to* STILLINGFLEET *for an explanation; he nods and smiles*) very delighted—(*Shakes hands again cordially, again turns to* STILLINGFLEET *for an explanation.*)

Re-enter LADY PINKNEY, *looking very much worried, upper door right, in evening dress, followed by* MRS. BEVIS.

MRS. BEVIS. Now, Bevis, we will dine at the Palace—

BEVIS. No, my dear. Uncle William has explained everything to me most satisfactorily, and for my part I shall be delighted to stay here and dine with my mother and Mrs. Wren——

(LADY PINKNEY *and* MRS. BEVIS *show great astonishment.*)

MRS. BEVIS. I don't understand——

BEVIS. May I present you to Mrs. Wren? (MRS. BEVIS *looks astounded.*) You may be quite sure, my dear, that I have thoroughly satisfied myself.

(JULIA *keeps on turning to* STILLINGFLEET *with a look of inquiring bewilderment.*)

BEVIS. (*To* MRS. BEVIS, *who still shows some reluctance to make* JULIA'S *acquaintance.*) I'll explain everything to you by-and-by. Meantime (*presenting*) my wife—Mrs. Wren!

(MRS. BEVIS *and* JULIA *bow to each other.*)

LADY P. (*Astonished.*) Bevis!

(*Draws him aside.* BEVIS *is seen to be explaining something in dumb show to* LADY PINKNEY.)

MRS. BEVIS. Mr. Samways.

(*Goes to* SAMWAYS *and is seen to be questioning him.*)

JULIA. (*Full of curiosity; beckons to* STILLINGFLEET, *draws him down stage away from the others.*) Do tell me! What have you explained to him about me?

STILL. (*glancing cautiously round at the other couples, whispers.*) Nothing!

JULIA. (*Surprised.*) Nothing?

STILL. (*Same caution, same whisper.*) Believe me, my dear Julia, there wasn't, there isn't and there never will be anything to explain!

(*Presses her hand.*)

Enter, left, TRIXIE *followed by* TEDDY, *both in*

evening dress. The three couples disengage themselves.

TEDDY. (*A little bashfully.*) I've brought Miss Blenkinsop back to dinner——

LADY P. My dear Trixie! I'm delighted.

TEDDY. What's going on? eh, Bevis?

BEVIS. Nothing, Teddy!—Nothing! a little family party—that's all!

Enter GRIGGS, *left.*

GRIGGS. Dinner is served, my Lady. (*Exit* GRIGGS.)

LADY P. Teddy, will you take Miss Blenkinsop? Mr. Samways (*indicating*), Mrs. Bevis. Bevis, you'd like to take in Mrs. Wren. Bill——

(*Calling him to her. The couples arrange themselves, the men giving their arms.*)

STILL. There! What did I always tell you? Now are you satisfied?

LADY P. Oh, if Bevis is satisfied, I am more than satisfied! (BEVIS *is taking* JULIA *past* LADY PINKNEY *as she speaks;* LADY PINKNEY *stops her and kisses her.*) Then everything is explained?

STILL. Everything!

(*Takes* JULIA'S *hand as she passes him and kisses it. Gives his arm to* LADY PINKNEY.)

(Owing to the difficulty of striking and setting the scene, the Epilogue is omitted in representation.)

EPILOGUE

Seventeen months pass between Act III. and the Epilogue.

Additional characters in the Epilogue:

MR. ELKINGTON.
THE MAYOR OF SHANCTONBURY, ETC.

THE EPILOGUE

SCENE—The Refreshment Tent in the grounds of the Bishop's Palace at Shanctonbury on the day of the annual bazaar and fête in aid of the curates' fund. Two years later than the first act. The tent is the same in construction, with the recessed opening at back, and the opening on the left side. The counter is now set along the back and is handsomely draped. The refreshments present a great contrast to the meagre supply of the first act. There are large heaped plates of strawberries and other fruits; sandwiches, sweets and other dainty little dishes, interspersed with handsome bouquets of cut flowers. Seats and stools in front of counter. Down stage, right centre, a small table with refreshments, at which is seated SAMWAYS with a large glass of mineral water in front of him; he is smoking a cigarette and looking over a legal document. At times he turns and listens to the conversation and shows great interest therein, punctuating the remarks with appropriate gestures, nods, etc., expressive of his own opinion on the subject.

Beside the refreshment counter are discovered JULIA, in a very pretty afternoon toilet, and STILLINGFLEET; she is serving the refreshments and he is helping her. In front of the counter are MRS. CHAYTOR, MRS. BEVIS, MISS FEWINGS and BEVIS. MEADE and CHARLIE DOBBS

are assisting JULIA and STILLINGFLEET in the cleaning plates, etc., in respective corners of the tent.

As curtain goes up the scene is very animated, and all the six people at the counter are chattering and laughing together. A band is playing in the distance.

MISS F. (*To* JULIA.) My dear Mrs. Stillingfleet, what delicious tea you always provide!

MRS. BEVIS. Yes, Julia, I must congratulate you on the charming way in which you have done the refreshments——

JULIA (*glancing mischievously at* STILLINGFLEET). We heard that there had been grave complaints about the refreshments in former years, so I determined to run it on different lines.

MRS. C. Oh, Julia. Sir William Butser, the great South American geologist, insists on meeting you at dinner one night. Can you make it next week?

JULIA. I don't think I can—can I, Will? We're full up every night.

MRS. BEVIS. Julia, you won't forget the meeting on Thursday—I have a special message for you from papa—he won't make an effort to conquer his gout unless he's quite sure you'll be there.

JULIA. Tell the dear Bishop I'm sure to be there to support him.

STILL. Julia, don't forget Mrs. Galer.

JULIA. Oh, I'd forgotten. Charlie!

CHARLIE. (CHARLIE *in smart page's costume steps forward.*) Yes, ma'am.

JULIA (*selecting a very choice dish of strawberries*). Take this to Mrs. Galer and say that Mrs. Stillingfleet has sent them, and hopes that she and the new baby are going on well.

CHARLIE. (*Takes the dish of strawberries.*) Yes, ma'am. (*Exit* CHARLIE *at back.*)

JULIA. Poor Mrs. Galer! Her tenth!

STILL. What a knack some people have of repeating the worst mistakes of their youth!

BEVIS. How much better it is to be guided by the experience gained from our past follies!

STILL. How much better still never to commit any folly at all; to be always wise and judicious like you, eh, Bevis? (*Giving him a nudge.*)

BEVIS. I can't say I have never committed any folly or mistake——

STILL. Oh, I think you might——

BEVIS. But I can honestly say that my past mistakes have really improved my character.

STILL. Ah, now, there's the danger with a character like yours. You'll go on improving it until it becomes a standing menace to all your neighbours.—For the sake of us poor every-day sinners don't—don't improve your character any further.

BEVIS. (*Plaintively, noticing that* STILLINGFLEET *and* SAMWAYS *are chuckling at him.*) I

wish you wouldn't jest about these things. (*Taking out watch.*) It's half-past four! My brother and his wife ought to be here.

JULIA. Hasn't anybody gone to the station to meet them?

BEVIS. Oh yes, Lord and Lady Pinkney and the Blenkinsonps—Oh! (*A peal of bells ringing out.*) They have arrived!

MRS. CHAY. (*looking off*). Yes, there they are! They're just getting out of the carriage!

MRS. BEVIS. How very brown and well Trixie looks.

MISS F. And so does Mr. Pinkney, doesn't he? We must go and congratulate them.

(*Exit* MISS FEWINGS *and* MRS. BEVIS.)

MRS. C. Aren't you coming, Julia?

JULIA. In a moment—as soon as I can leave my stall. (*Exit* MRS. CHAYTOR.)

STILL. Come along, Bevis—we'll go and welcome the happy couple.

BEVIS. Yes, I believe marriage will really improve Teddy.

STILL. Ah! But he'll never come up to your standard.

(*Exit* STILLINGFLEET *left.* JULIA *and* MEADE *are occupied at back.* JULIA *sends off* MEADE.)

BEVIS. (*Is following* STILLINGFLEET *off, returns to* SAMWAYS.) In spite of my uncle's un-

seemly ridicule, I'm sure you don't misunderstand my character, Samways. (SAMWAYS *cordially grasps him by the hand.*) That little mistake of mine has really improved me, I think? (SAMWAYS *again cordially grasps his hand.*)

BEVIS. Thank you.

(*Shaking hands. Exit left.*)

Enter LADY PINKNEY *at back.*

LADY P. Ah, Julia. Teddy and Trixie have returned, and, of course, you were the first friend whom they asked for.

JULIA. I'll run over to them. Will you look after my stall for a moment?

LADY P. Certainly. Ah, my dear Julia—(*Beginning to cry a little.*) When I remember that I owe all my happiness to you——

JULIA. No, dear Lady Pinkney——

LADY P. Yes, dear. It's you who have brought about this happy marriage—(*Crying a little.*) I can never repay you!

JULIA. Don't mention it. I owe quite as much to you for having cleared me of all that wretched slander.

(*Kisses* LADY PINKNEY *and exit.*)

SAMWAYS. (*Jumps up from his table.*) And I must go and pay my respects to the bride and bridegroom.

LADY P. I hear you have let The Elms——

SAMWAYS. Yes—to a Mr. Elkington. Ah!

MR. ELKINGTON *enters left, a very staid, sober, solid, stolid, respectable upper middle-class Englishman about fifty.*

MR. E. You have prepared the lease?

SAMWAYS. Yes, I brought it with me as time presses.

MR. E. Thank you. Now there is just that one little question to be considered——

SAMWAYS. Oh yes—perhaps I'd better introduce you to Lady Pinkney. Lady Pinkney, may I present Mr. Elkington, who has taken The Elms?

LADY P. How d'ye do?

MR. E. How d'ye do?

LADY P. I'm pleased to find we shall have you for a neighbour——

MR. E. Yes—it is almost settled—but—(*Hesitating.*) there is one rather delicate matter ——

LADY P. Yes——

MR. E. If we take The Elms, our only near neighbours will be Mr. and Mrs. Stillingfleet at the Mount——

LADY P. Yes——

MR. E. (*Embarrassed.*) Could I have a cup of tea?

LADY P. By all means. Do you like it strong or weak?

MR. E. Medium—quite medium. Mrs. Stillingfleet——

LADY P. Yes——

MR. E. You will excuse my broaching this—

(*Glancing at* SAMWAYS.)

SAMWAYS (*coming to the rescue*). Mr. Elkington has heard of those silly rumours——

LADY P. Oh—is that all? Now, my dear Mr. Elkington, ask me any question you please about Mrs. Stillingfleet—I shall be delighted to answer.

(*Handing cup of tea.*)

MR. E. Thank you. No sugar, thank you. A little more milk—thank you. My wife is anxious to know——

LADY P. Mrs. Elkington is not with you?

MR. E. No—she is suffering from an obscure form of gouty dyspepsia, which disables her for the moment. But her mind is unusually active. My wife, I may mention, is the only daughter of Mr. Beecher-Sprowston——

LADY P. Beecher-Sprowston?

MR. E. The eminent philanthropist who had all his windows smashed on account of his advanced morality——

LADY P. I understood it was because he said something in public that reflected on a lady——

MR. E. Yes, it's the same thing. He was a

little violent in his methods, but he was a true reformer. And being the daughter of Beecher-Sprowston my wife is naturally anxious about our neighbours at the Mount.

LADY P. Well?

MR. E. Was Mrs. Wren married—there was a foreign Royal Duke——

LADY P. The Duke of Savona. Oh yes—it was a morganatic marriage.

MR. E. Indeed!

LADY P. Not a formal morganatic marriage, but something quite equivalent to it.

MR. E. Oh! I'm very glad to hear that she was really married to the Duke.

LADY P. Oh yes. We inquired thoroughly into the whole matter. Of course the law relating to morganatic marriages is in a perfect chaos, isn't it? (*Appealing to* SAMWAYS.)

SAMWAYS. Shocking! Shocking! Somebody will have to take it in hand and unravel it!

MR. E. And this morganatic marriage?

LADY P. Mrs. Wren never went out of her way to prove her rights in a court of law—that would have been undignified.

SAMWAYS. Most undignified!

LADY P. She rather allowed people to hint and gossip and sneer. (*To* SAMWAYS.) Perhaps she ought to have asserted her claim?

SAMWAYS. Well—you see—the law being as it is——

LADY P. Yes, she acted wisely in keeping silence. Oh, she behaved admirably throughout —Though she had great provocation. The Duchess of Savona was a very disagreeable person—her treatment had a great deal to do with the poor Duke's early end.

MR. E. Indeed! I thought he died of German measles.

LADY P. Accelerated by his wife's treatment. German measles alone would never have taken off a fine handsome man like that. Oh, no! You may assure Mrs. Elkington that you will have most delightful neighbours at the Mount. Mrs. Stillingfleet is, as she has always been, above reproach in every way. And Mr. Stillingfleet is of course my brother.

MR. E. Your brother?! Pray forgive me. I had no idea——

LADY P. Oh, I'm very glad to have reassured you about our dear Julia.

MR. E. (*To* SAMWAYS.) You should have told me that Mr. Stillingfleet was Lady Pinkney's brother!

SAMWAYS. I thought you knew it!

LADY P. (*looking off*). Here are my newly married son and daughter— (*Looking off.*) They have just returned from their honeymoon.

MR. E. (*Very inquisitively and mysteriously to* SAMWAYS.) But wasn't there some story about a puff-box?

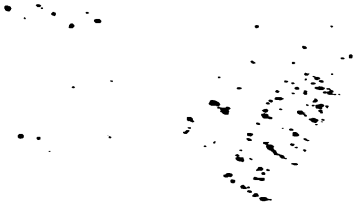
SAMWAYS. Hush! The puff-box was a myth! A pure myth! A slander!

MR. E. Was it? What a dreadful world we live in! How full of scandal!

Enter, left, TRIXIE *and* TEDDY *in travelling dress, very lovingly, followed by* BEVIS *and* MRS. BEVIS, MRS. CHAYTOR, MISS FEWINGS, *the* MAYOR OF SHANCTONBURY *in robes, and a crowd of others.*

Enter at back JULIA *and* STILLINGFLEET.

(*They all begin chattering and clamouring for tea. Band and wedding bells outside.*)



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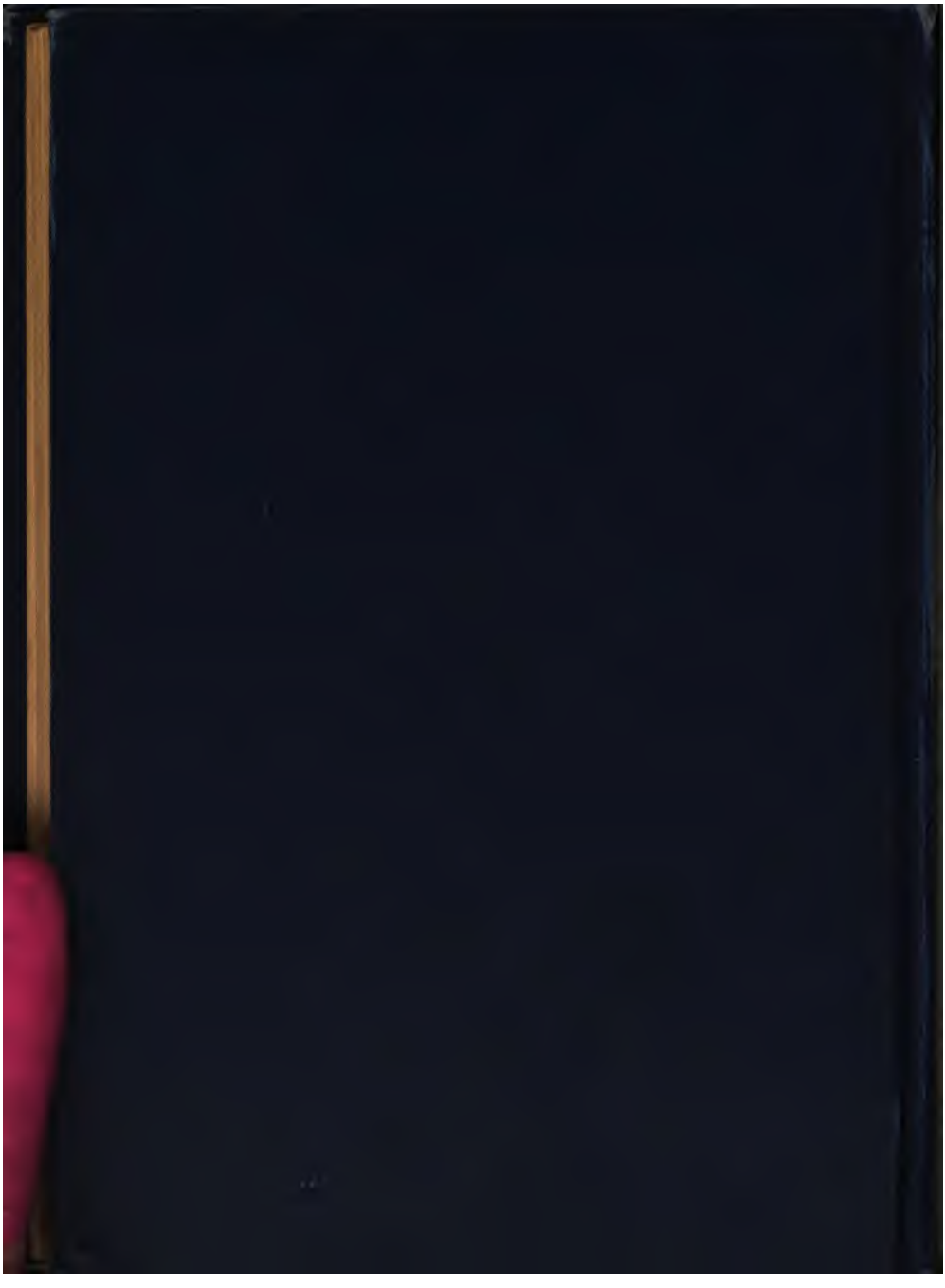
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